LONG LIVE VINYL

ISSUE 16
JULY 2018
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VAUGHAN OLIVER
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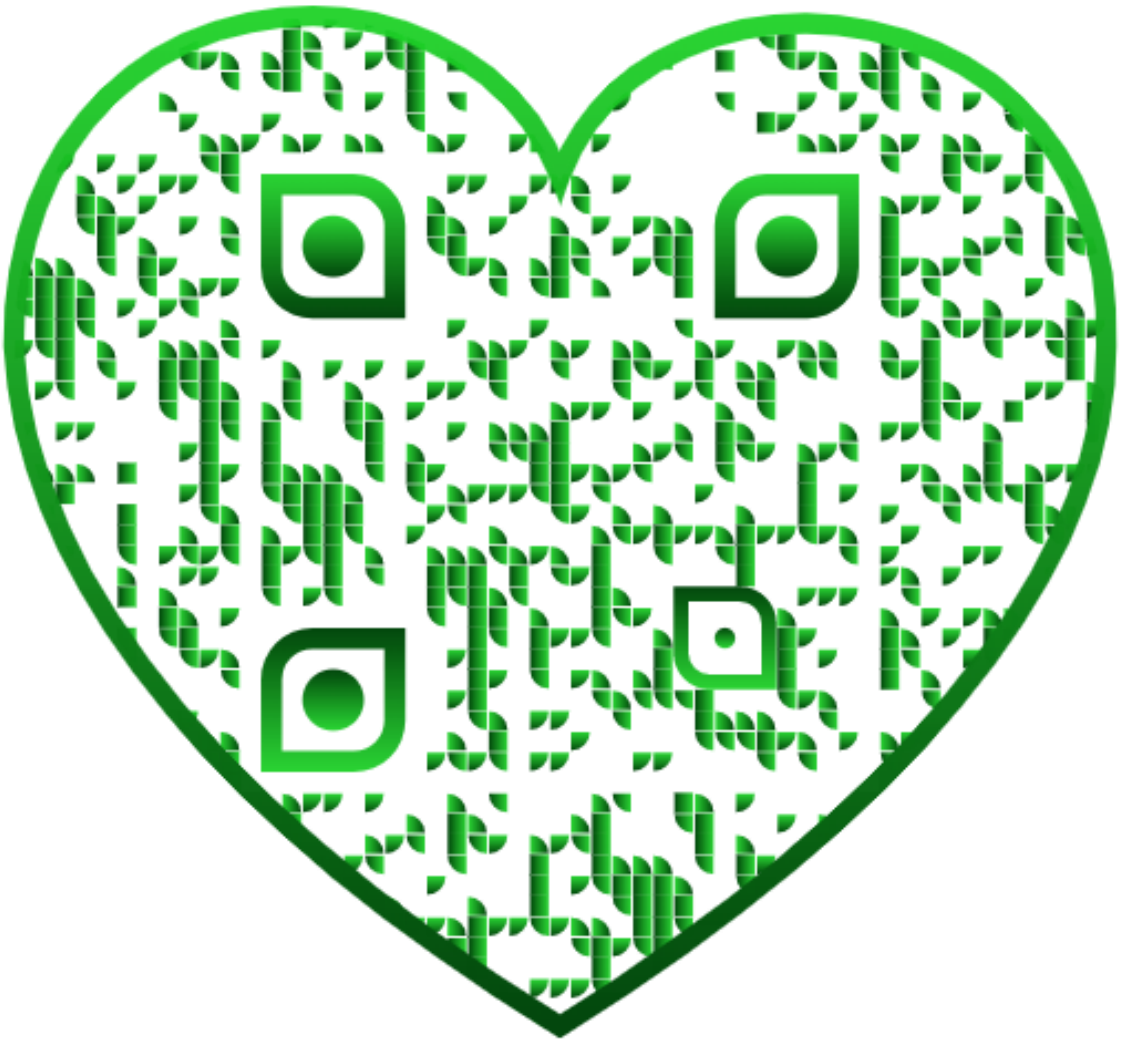

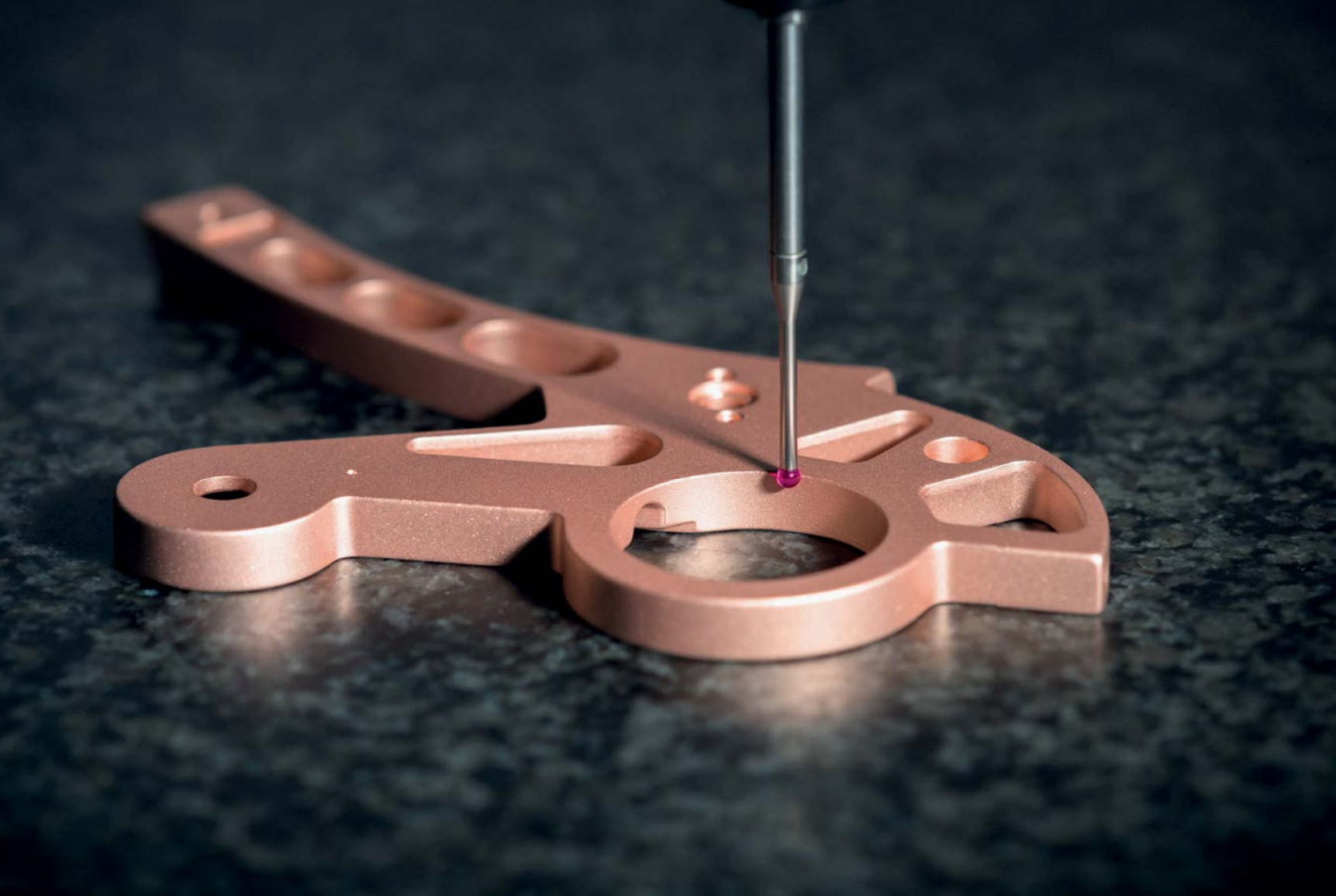

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Welcome...

At the height of his phenomenal powers, a typical touring day for Prince would involve a four-hour soundcheck and a three-hour show, before he checked in to a local studio to 'start work'. "He would consider 1am, after playing a stadium show, the point at which his day could begin," remembers Susan Rogers, the sound engineer who helped polish some of the finest pop diamonds ever made. "I didn't get a chance to form memories, because I didn't sleep long enough to form them," she has said of the furiously creative period from 1983 to '87 that she spent working with this musical polymath and pioneer.

Perhaps never before or since has such a tireless work ethic been matched by equally outrageous talent and vision. For a glimpse of that ludicrous virtuosity, and the awestruck esteem in which Prince was held by other artists, treat yourself to six minutes watching his performance of *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* at George Harrison's posthumous 2004 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction. Rock royalty Tom Petty, Steve Winwood and Jeff Lynne are rendered redundant by his blistering fretboard work – guitar tossed nonchalantly into the air at its conclusion.

Our cover story celebrates the astonishing output Prince unleashed from 1978 to '88

This issue hits the streets on what would have been Prince's 60th birthday, and our cover story celebrates the astonishing output he unleashed from 1978 to '88 – 10 albums that shaped the future of pop and are still being emulated by bands and solo artists today. Sadly, he joined the group of musical giants taken from us too soon, in 2016 – five days after attending Record Store Day at his local record shop in Minnesota and buying albums by Stevie Wonder, Joni Mitchell and Santana.

Once you've finished reading our tribute to this singular genius, turn to p52 for our Essential Prince feature and find out which of the Purple One's records are missing from your own collection.

Elsewhere this issue, we speak to Johnny Marr about his best solo album to date, *Call The Comet*, meet Wire and Josh T. Pearson, and hear from legendary 4AD artist-in-residence Vaughan Oliver about creating sleeves for indie classics by Pixies, The Breeders and Cocteau Twins. We take an in-depth look at the making of one of the best-selling records of all time, Carole King's *Tapestry*, meet the people behind the Drag City label – a Chicago institution with an eclectic roster and a true sense of community – and Mark Elliott explores Belfast in the latest instalment of The Trip. Thanks for reading.

Gary Walker *Editor*

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LONG LIVE VINYL

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LONG LIVE VINYL

The *Long Live Vinyl* team pick their favourite Prince records…

Gary Walker
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Owen Bailey
I Would Die 4 U
Prince And The Revolution

Jonny Highett
Raspberry Beret
Prince And The Revolution

Andy Cottle
When Doves Cry
Prince And The Revolution

Ian Peel
Paisley Park picture disc
Prince And The Revolution

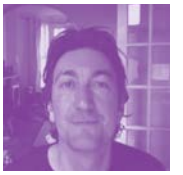
Meet our expert contributors…

Simon Raymonde
Simon was the bassist and keyboard player in the Cocteau Twins; he's currently in Lost Horizons. He launched the independent label Bella Union in 1997. His label has been a home to bands including Fleet Foxes, The Flaming Lips, Midlake, Father John Misty, John Grant, Explosions In The Sky and Lanterns On The Lake. He's also produced many great albums.

Jennifer Otter Bickerdike
Dr Jennifer Otter Bickerdike is a media and music academic and author, specialising in fan culture, the cult of dead celebrity, music and music heritage. Jen's current book, the No. 1 charting *Why Vinyl Matters*, is a manifesto about the importance of vinyl as a cultural object, and has interviews with a variety of fans, including Tim Burgess, Henry Rollins and Fatboy Slim.

Murray Stassen
After making DIY punk fanzines as a teenager in South Africa, Murray moved to London in 2008 and went on to write for *VICE*, among others, before landing a job at *Music Week*, swiftly working his way up to deputy editor and having Brian Wilson turn his back on him during an interview in the process. Murray now edits *Audio Media International*.

Jonathan Wright
Jonathan began writing about music in the late 80s. He's interviewed such singular talents as Shaun Ryder, Edwyn Collins and Richey Edwards. He's written for *The Guardian*, *Classic Pop* and many others. Jonathan edited *Adventure Rocketship! Let's All Go To The Science Fiction Disco*, a book of essays about the interface between geek culture and music.



Neil Crossley
Neil is a journalist and editor who writes about music and TV. His work has appeared in *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph* and *The Independent*. Neil is also a singer-songwriter and was in the Tony Visconti-produced project International Blue, a 21st-century take on the art of pop crooning. Neil fronts the band Furlined, described as "Morrissey meets Americana".

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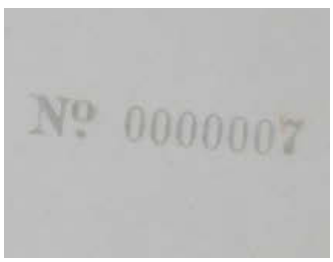

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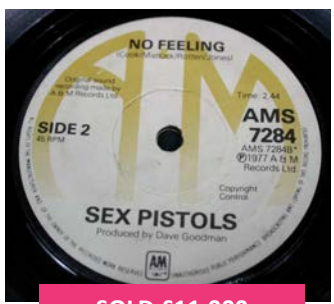

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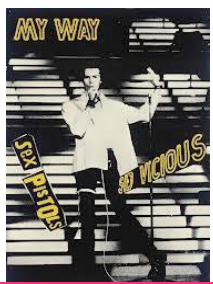

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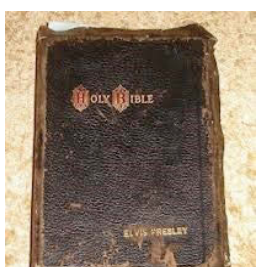
Elvis Presley's Bible



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On the record

NOTHING COMPARES 2 PRINCE

Prince's estate releases original version of *Nothing Compares 2 U* found in the vault, and launches new, in-depth discography and pop-up shop websites for fans

Having recently discovered the original version of *Nothing Compares 2 U*, Prince's estate has followed up with black-vinyl and picture-disc editions, a pop-up online store and a detailed discography website. The vinyl releases are available only from the online store – at www.princehitnrun.com – and feature the 4:12 Edit Version of *Nothing Compares 2 U* and the 4:40 Full Length Version on the B-side. The discography site at www.princeestate.com promises: "audio previews, photos, videos and editorial commentary... a rich platform for fans".

The discovery of pre-Sinéad O'Connor *Nothing Compares 2 U* master tapes really was a chance discovery. "I spotted the two-inch multi-track reel in the vault while doing a 1984-era inventory," the Prince estate's archivist Michael Howe says. "We took the reel upstairs, analysed it, put it up on a Studer 24-track machine, and digitised it… Even our 'faders up' rough mix was compelling enough to indicate this was something very special indeed. Hearing the song in its original context, performed in its entirety by the author, makes it particularly noteworthy."

BEHIND THE MASK
***The Brand/Unmasked* is a lavish (300 pages, rubberised covers) new book exploring the history of Devo, illustrated throughout with "classic iconography".**

ROXY MUSIC
Craft Recordings delivers a 20th anniversary, double-LP reissue of Social Distortion's *Live At The Roxy* on 29 June. It includes a replica of the orginal release's poster.

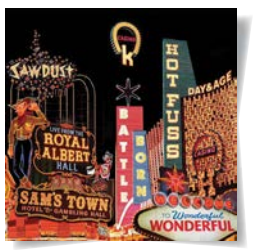
Promised You A Miracle Mile

The chilled sister company of London label Fire, Frost Records, are giving Tangerine Dream's forgotten, synth-driven 1989 soundtrack to cult apocalyptic US thriller *Miracle Mile* its first release on vinyl. "I was blessed to be able to go over to Vienna and work with Edgar and Paul until we had the whole show cued and locked for the mix," remembers director Steve De Jarnatt. "I'm not even sure the film works at all without their sublime music. The ticking clock, the elegiac melancholy of love at the end of the world… Among the best experiences of my life."

SLEEPER AWOKEN
Sleeper's first new album in 21 years is set for release early in 2019 with black- and coloured-vinyl editions (plus the test pressings, lyric sheets and a cassette edition) available to order via Pledge Music.

IBIZA FOREVER
Hï Ibiza has teamed up with its Glitterbox DJs – including Basement Jaxx, David Morales, Masters At Work, Roger Sanchez and Todd Terry – to create a unique record collection to auction for the Ibiza Preservation Fund.

DANCE DOC
A new documentary from Carl Cox and Martin Garrix is now available on streaming services. *What We Started* traces the story of EDM with guest appearances from David Guetta, Erick Morillo, Paul Oakenfold and Seth Troxler.



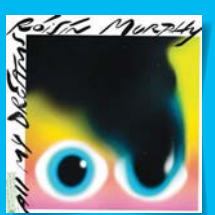
ALL KILLERS, NO FILLER

CAREER BOX ON CLEAR VINYL

The Killers are set to release a career-spanning vinyl boxset – including a limited-edition version and special merch items – on 15 June. The rather blandly titled *The Killers Career Vinyl Box* will include all of their seven albums to date, plus a new-to-vinyl double live album and a slipmat with a design based around the band's logo. There will also be a limited-edition version, with each LP on 180-gram clear vinyl.

RÓISÍN'S FOUR-PIECE SUITE

Róisín Murphy kicks off a series of four monthly 12" single releases, produced by Baltimore DJ Maurice Fulton. Sleeves are designed by Bráulio Amado and each will be released through The Vinyl Factory. The first – *All My Dreams/ Innocence* – is out now.



BOWIE'S BAAL AND BAHNHOF ZOO

David's Bowie's estate has readied two new releases for release on 29 June, which will be exclusive to "bricks and mortar" record shops. First up, a limited-edition red-vinyl reissue of the 1981 soundtrack *Christiane F. Wir Kinder Vom Bahnhof Zoo*, which includes tracks from *Station To Station*, *Low*, *"Heroes"* and *Lodger*. There's also a limited 10" (in six-panel sleeve) of 1982's *Bertolt Brecht's Baal*. This features five songs recorded with Tony Visconti, recently included on the *Re:Call 3* discs of the *A New Career In A New Town* boxset.

Simon says

SIMON RAYMONDE

The magical music and the creative mechanics behind our columnist's former band, Cocteau Twins, defy explanation – particularly by the band members themselves…

Looking back over some of the press cuttings from my Cocteau Twins days (1983 to 1997) in an attempt to jog my memory for a book I'm writing, it's a wonder that people even dare to speak to me. I was quite convinced, for a period, that we were in fact not human at all, but had glided down on gossamer wing from some celestial plain. Interviewers seemed genuinely disappointed when we answered the door in clothes and not capes.

The perception and the reality were quite a way apart. While we could often be seen materialising from a cloud of smoke, it wasn't our rumoured ability to apparate; it was when we got the munchies and needed to go and get chocolate, or when the roadie got carried away with the fog machine.

Certainly, imagery surrounding the band, initially anyhow, and our questionable decision to agree to film the *Pearly-Dewdrops' Drops* video in a church probably didn't help. And the interviews… They were often funny to read, but frustrating for all, as our disinterest and unwillingness to discuss the making of our music tended to irritate those who wanted to discover how we came up with such a sound.

I guess, looking back on it, we had a fairly humble and modest appreciation of what we did, which – for a while, at least – kept us grounded. What was striking was that both Robin and Elizabeth were superbly talented, in very different ways, but both thought nothing of these gifts, and I found that utterly charming. Elizabeth's voice should be a subject taught in school; and I have to herald the ears and vision of Robin Guthrie, who single-handedly defined the unique sound of the band prior to my arrival. He had a picture in his head of what he wanted it all to sound like. I am just glad I fitted in, and was able to contribute to that.

It felt natural being in the studio with Robin and Elizabeth, and the differences between us all were a strength. Why couldn't we explain why we sounded like we did? To be brutally honest, we simply did not want to know! I think even early on, we realised that there was a chemistry there with the three of us, though in our first sessions for *The Spanglemaker/Pearly-Dewdrops' Drops* EP we were definitely all feeling each other out, and the *Treasure* sessions – three weeks at Palladium studio in Scotland in August and September 1984, were a little stressful. We had told 4AD we had all 10 songs ready to record, whereas in reality, we had none. In all our 14 years of making music together, we never demoed or 'wrote' songs in a conventional way. Robin and I arrived in the studio and turned the tape machine on, and recorded whatever came out of our instruments. We liked making stuff up as we went along, and the excitement of not knowing what you would do every morning when you arrived in the studio wasn't terrifying, it was liberating. Elizabeth worked in exactly the same way, generally on her own, but nearby. But as we neared the end of the three weeks, it did feel and sound like we weren't quite finished. When the record came out two months later, there was a surprising reaction that baffled us, to be honest. The album was universally adored, and went straight into the UK Album Chart at No. 29, and stayed in the charts for eight weeks. *Melody Maker* called the band "the voice of God", which was almost as daft as Robin saying it was an "abortion"; and while we knew we could do a lot better, for our first concentrated time together as a trio in the studio, it was a great learning curve.

Robin and I agreed that if the magic was not there after 15 to 20 minutes, we wouldn't bother trying to force it, we would go bowling

But those questions kept coming thick and fast, yet we continued to play them back with a straight bat. We were scared. We knew if we started to analyse why something happened the way it did, it would destroy the magic and the excitement, so we refused to ask ourselves these questions and declined to answer theirs… and continued to arrive at the studio with nothing.

Once we had our own studio space, Robin and I agreed early on, that if the magic was not there after 15 to 20 minutes, we wouldn't bother trying to force it, we would go bowling. There were two 10-pin bowling alleys nearby, and Robin usually beat me. We tried snooker, and Robin usually won at that, too. Darts, Robin usually won at that. But while all these leisure breaks sound idyllic, they were few and far between – because most of the time, the music came together in a short time. I really don't know why. It's baffling, but still I don't think there has to be this constant, demanding 'WHY?'.

Can't we just sometimes let the magic exist and not question it? Did Sartre not suggest man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and then defines himself afterwards? ●

SIMON RAYMONDE *is currently in Lost Horizons and was the bassist and keyboard player in Cocteau Twins. He founded the independent record label Bella Union*

Discogs TRENDING CHART

The Top 10 trending vinyl releases from the Discogs community this month

10 Jeff Buckley
Live At Sin-é

9 David Bowie
David Bowie

8 Brian Eno With Kevin Shields
The Weight Of History/ Only Once Away My Son

7 Madonna
The First Album

6 Ramones
Sundragon Sessions

5 Neil Young
Roxy: Tonight's The Night Live

4 The National
Boxer Live In Brussels

3 Bruce Springsteen
Greatest Hits

2 David Bowie
Let's Dance: Demo

1 Soundgarden
A-Sides

Official Vinyl Albums Chart

MAY 2018

1 Tranquility Base Hotel + Casino
Arctic Monkeys

2 Aladdin Sane
David Bowie

3 Cool Like You
Blossoms

4 Welcome To The Blackout (Live London '78)
David Bowie

5 The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn
Pink Floyd

6 Be More Kind
Frank Turner

7 The Greatest Showman
Motion Picture Cast Recording

8 Now
David Bowie

9 Singularity
Jon Hopkins

10 Arcade Fire
Arcade Fire

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Vinyl Dublin Show Report

Described in its pre-publicity as a 'unique culture event', Vinyl Dublin – an ambitious celebration of everyone's favourite sound carrier – turned out be pretty much exactly that. Half summer literary festival, half backstage party at the Mercury Music Prize, the conference took place over a scorching May Bank Holiday weekend in Dublin at the Irish Museum Of Modern Art.

Appearances included Shane MacGowan, Tracey Thorn, Snow Patrol, Gruff Rhys, Bob Geldof, Tim Burgess, The Undertones, Can's Irmin Schmidt, Portishead's Geoff Barrow, Donovan, Kevin Shields, Chrissie Hynde, Peggy Seeger, Billy Bragg, Brix Smith-Start, Cosey Fanni Tutti, Lol Tolhurst, Scott Gorham, James Lavelle and Andy Weatherall, along with many names that only those who pore over album liner notes would recognise – Buzzcocks sleeve designer Malcolm Garrett, renowned *NME* photographer Chalkie Davies, Stiff Records impresario Dave Robinson… Choice moments included *Peaky Blinders*' Cillian Murphy interviewing U2/ Smashing Pumpkins producer Flood on how he assembles a hit; Martin Freeman bringing his avuncular gravitas to a celebration of mod culture with Eddie Piller, and The Charlatans' Tim Burgess sharing his frighteningly eclectic music taste with *Catastrophe* star Sharon Horgan. There was even a *Long Live Vinyl* special, where Bella Union's Simon Raymonde waxed lyrical with regular contributor Ben Wardle.

What made the event so special was the easy approachability of everyone involved. Many guests stayed talking to fans long after the interviews had finished. And of course, bang in the middle of the event was Tower Records (one of only three stores to still bear its legendary name and logo), who had set up a pop-up record shop selling vinyl deep into the night. Roll on next year!

James Murray/Stillpix

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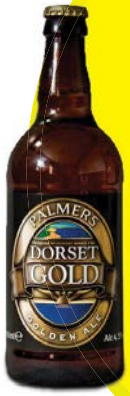
#14 In The Aeroplane Over The Sea

Neutral Milk Hotel

Having conceived the artwork for debut album *On Avery Island* himself, Neutral Milk Hotel's Jeff Mangum called in a previous offer of help from R.E.M. and Green Day sleeve designer Chris Bilheimer for this 1998 follow-up. Remaining heavily involved, Mangum wanted "turn-of-the-century, penny arcade kind of imagery", had a postcard he wanted to use, and had already commissioned some illustrations, which ended up inside the sleeve. The challenge for Bilheimer was to make those new illustrations work with his rustic design. The Athens, Georgia artist set to work on artificially ageing the new images and producing a weathered lyric sheet – there's also a grubby stain in the top left of the front cover, and his design is lent an air of surrealism, as the woman's head is replaced by a drum. The record was a cult success, the sixth-highest-selling vinyl album of 2008 in the US, with sales nearing 400,000 Stateside by 2013.

Now Spinning



The 12 essential tracks on *Long Live Vinyl*'s turntable this month. Enjoy them with this issue's companion beer – Palmers Dorset Gold, a thirst-quenching premium ale brewed on the beautiful Jurassic Coast

1 ***U Got The Look*** – Prince (Paisley Park/Warner Bros.)
2 *Just A Fool* – **Jim James (ATO Records)**
3 ***Straight To The Top!*** – Josh T. Pearson (Mute)
4 *Papa's Got A Brand New Bag* – **Fadaul Et Les Privilèges (Habibi Funk)**
5 ***America*** – Simon & Garfunkel (Columbia)
6 *It Hurts* – **Jenny Wilson (Gold Medal Recordings)**
7 ***Rush Hill Road*** – The Orb (Cooking Vinyl)
8 *She Makes My Nose Bleed* – **Mansun (Parlophone)**
9 ***Strange*** – Wire (Harvest)
10 *Fists Of Fury* – **Kamasi Washington (Young Turks)**
11 ***My Queen Is Harriet Tubman*** – Sons Of Kemet (Impulse!)
12 *Donnie Darko* – **Let's Eat Grandma (Transgressive)**

PIXIES' FIVE-NIGHT STAND

Although detailed information has yet to become available, we can confirm that 24 August will see a 30th Anniversary Deluxe Edition of Pixies' groundbreaking debut album, *Surfer Rosa*. Produced by Steve Albini and recorded at the end of 1987 on the outskirts of Boston, this is an album that the Smashing Pumpkins, Radiohead and PJ Harvey have all since cited as a major influence. Kurt Cobain also declared the LP as his "second favourite of all time", and one of the main influences behind Nirvana's *Nevermind*. Released on 4AD, the reissue will accompany a five-night stand at the Roundhouse, London, where the band will perform both *Surfer Rosa* and *Come On Pilgrim* in their entirety.

POISON REBOTTLED

1988 HAIR-METAL CLASSIC REISSUED

Poison celebrate the 30th anniversary of five-times-Platinum hair-metal classic *Open Up And Say… Ahh!* with two vinyl editions, both out now. 'Select retailers' have been provided with a 180g red-vinyl edition and there's a 1,000-copy green-vinyl edition available exclusively via The Sound Of Vinyl. The reissue restores the album's original full-frame cover art, which featured a glammed-up cat person's elongated tongue extending down the middle of the cover, ultimately protruding between the last two words of the album title.

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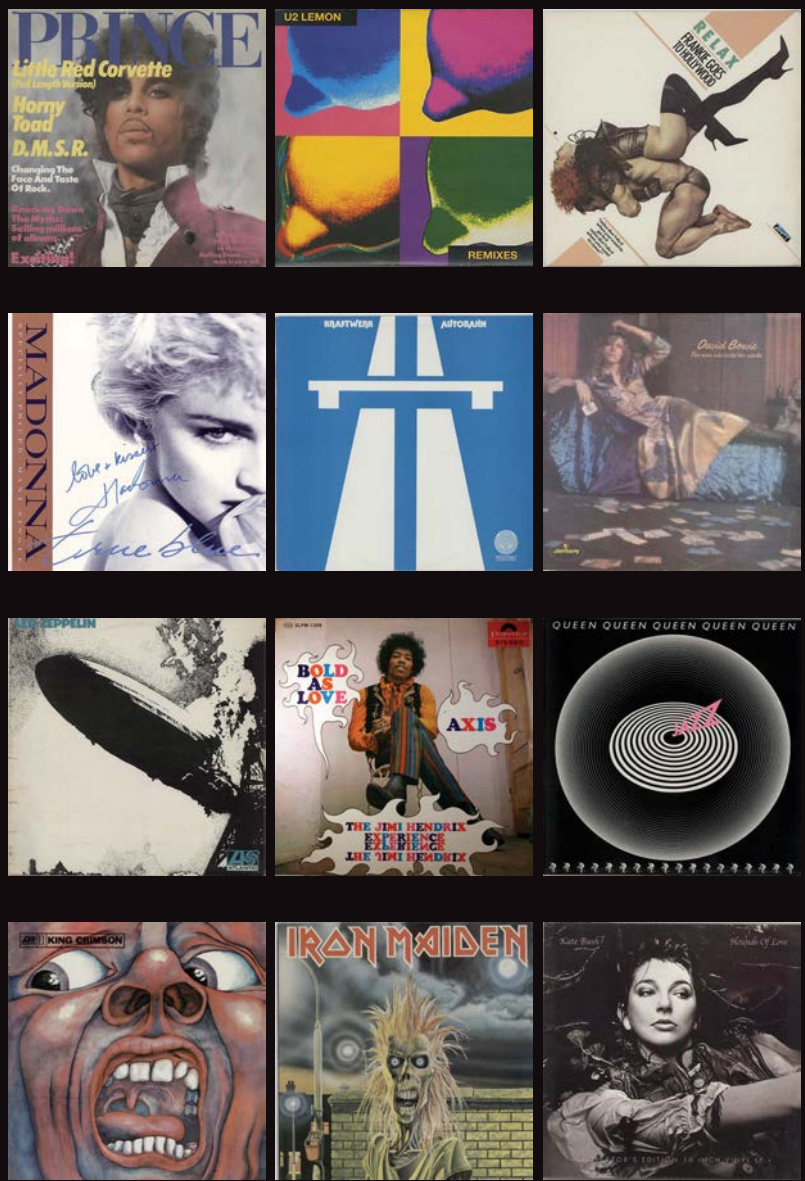

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The Studio Albums Vinyl Collection 1971-2016 is a does-what-it-says-on-the-tin, limited-edition vinyl boxset from The Rolling Stones. Out 15 June, it features all of the group's 15 albums of the period across 20 LPs. Each individually numbered, 180-gram album has been cut at half speed from the original masters at Abbey Road and includes "a download card for HD digital redemption of the catalogue and a numbered certificate of authentication".

BIG SCREEN MO' WAX

Arriving in cinemas on 31 August, *The Man From Mo' Wax* is a biopic of the founder of Mo' Wax Records, James Lavelle. Featuring previously unseen home-video footage from both Lavelle and DJ Shadow, the film also includes interviews with their UNKLE associates and inspirations, including Ian Brown, Thom Yorke, Badly Drawn Boy and Grandmaster Flash. After playing at select cinemas around the UK, the BFI will release a numbered, limited-edition Blu-ray/DVD edition.

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WIRE

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1979 UK 13-track LP with A1/B2 matrices, the third album from the English post-punk band, complete with bonus four-track 7" EP (SHSP4105).

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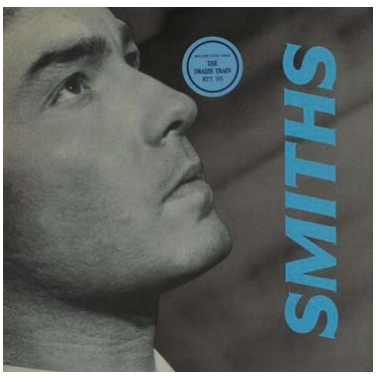

THE SMITHS

PANIC

1986 UK limited-edition three-track 12" vinyl single with 'timtom' and 'I Dreamt About Stew Last Night' in the run-out grooves, housed in the hype-stickered picture sleeve with matching blue die-cut inner and labels, plus bonus sheet of nine stickers (RTT193).

£ **£75**

PRINCE

BATMAN

1989 UK limited-edition nine-track vinyl picture-disc LP featuring the Batman logo, including *Batdance*, *The Future* and *The Arms Of Orion* performed with Sheena Easton, housed in a die-cut title sleeve (WX281P).

£ **£50**

On The Radar

JENNY WILSON

The Swedish singer-songwriter confronts horrific experiences through her music

Jenny Wilson is used to conjuring beautiful art from the dark moments in her life. After achieving domestic cult status with Swedish band First Floor Power – one of the few acts signed to The Knife's Rabid Records imprint – Wilson went on to release her triple-Swedish Grammi-winning album *Demand The Impossible!* in 2013 while undergoing treatment for cancer. She returns now with *Exorcism*; an eviscerating, bleak and candid reflection on her own harrowing experiences of sexual assault.

As the title suggests, the record captures Wilson's efforts to jettison the trauma of the attack. It's an incredibly personal, uncompromising and disturbing listen, which tackles her experiences head on and without euphemism.

"It was something very dark and tremendously scary that I knew I had to take care of in a creative way, because that's how I live my life, through my art and my music," Jenny says. "I think that's something I feel comfortable with, taking the shit and making something beautiful out of it."

Now, two years after the attack, Jenny feels she's in a "bright place", but the first year was filled with anxiety and sorrow. "It was so scary to dig that deep into it," she says. It took six months of isolation from the creative process to let go of some of her anxiety and begin making sense of how she felt.

"It was so difficult to actually find the language for this topic, because I didn't choose this topic, the topic actually kind of picked me," Jenny explains. "At first, when I started to think about how I would confront the subject, I thought, 'maybe I should make it really intellectual – about women of the world – or make it more political, like a statement', but I couldn't because it was such a physical experience.

"I had a feeling that I had this story that didn't belong to my intellect, it didn't belong to my mind or brain, it was there in my stomach, in my body."

That thought process resulted in an astoundingly frank album. The lead track *Rapin** deals with her experience in no uncertain terms: "Beam me up, take me down/ Did you pick me because there's no one else around?/ Up, another round, come on and pick me/ Because you wanna drag me down."

Although Wilson felt "naked, very lonely and scared" writing this way, she knew it was the only way she could address her trauma. This style of writing, and the use of her Prophet-6 analogue synth, creates a brutal, uncomfortable listen… but unquestionably adds to the subject matter.

Although Jenny insists she'd have made this record regardless of the #MeToo and Time's Up movements, she feels the attention that sexual-assault scandals are getting in the media has made things easier. "It was like a god sent a gift that the #MeToo movement came when it came," she says. "I was so relieved, because I was almost ready with my album. I was finished doing the last details and I had already nailed all of the lyrics, and when the #MeToo movement happened, I felt much more secure to have this very delicate material to share. I was so scared to be forced to be some kind of spokesperson about rape and being a victim and all that, and I did not wish at all to talk about it in that way. I just wanted to tell my own very super-personal, private story."

Bringing dark and disturbing experiences to light not only permeates the album's content; it also adorns the artwork and format: "I was very clear that I wanted a cover with a lot of strong colours and I wanted the eye, because it's like the witness," says Jenny. "The guy who made the design, he just asked me if I also wanted a glow-in-the-dark print. I immediately said: 'Yes', because it looks so delicious, but it also makes sense. I think it's like turning the darkness to something glowing. Take something dark and turn it to something that glows." ● ***Sam Willis***

IAN PEEL'S LINER NOTES

In my recent Liner Notes on double-groove records, I spotlighted artists from the A-list (Kate Bush) to the Z-list (Westworld) who had adopted this bizarre format. But it seems I only just scratched the surface…

Double-groove records can play two tracks on the same section of the same side of vinyl. The pressing plant – at least the 80s-era, gimmick-fixated plant – achieved this by pressing an extra, concentric groove with a different song alongside the original groove playing the main attraction.

How can you choose which of the two tracks to play back? The answer is: you can't. You just drop the needle and discover which song comes on purely by chance. And while The Blow Monkeys' *Wicked Way*s was my first double-groove release, it seems this was far from the first record of its kind.

So, thank you to Emmanuel Goedseels, a reader from Belgium, for getting in touch. "I read your article about double-groove 12"s," he says, "and, as far as I remember, the first I have ever seen and bought was M's *Pop Muzik* in 1979. The sleeve even mentioned it."

This New Wave-defining single was released seven years before The Blow Monkeys' single, and the front cover trumpets the release as 'The first "Double-Groove" single'. On the A-side was the 7" version of *Pop Muzik,* with the original 7" B-side, *M Factor,* locked in on the double-groove. Both tracks, incidentally, feature Level 42 alumnus Phil Gould, Gary Barnacle and Wally Badarou. Putting both tracks, one on top of each other, saw the sleeve declaring 'B side included on A side, full length disco mix of *Pop Musik* on 'Seaside'!'

Putting both tracks, one on top of each other, saw the Pop Muzik sleeve declaring 'B side included on A side, full length disco mix of Pop Musik on 'Seaside'!'

The actual vinyl cut was carried out by Denis Blackham, aka the infamous Bilbo. At studios including Phonodisc and RCA, Bilbo cut more than a thousand records across the 70s and 80s. And, like his mentor George 'Porky' Peckham, he would often leave a message scratched in the run-out groove.

The message in the run-out groove of the 12" of *Pop Muzik* gives the impression the pressing-plant team felt they'd been asked to achieve the impossible with this release: but were thrilled they'd delivered the goods. 'Bilbo for grooves and Nik for edits and brain damage!', the scratched credits read. 'Get your clogs off to this one, folks…' I had the pleasure of working with M – otherwise known as maverick producer and songwriter Robin Scott – back in 2009. I was promoting a compilation of remixes of *Pop Muzik* he'd put together, with versions by Steve Osbourne and Junior Vasquez.

When we weren't working on the album, he was concentrating on setting up the first environmentally conscious, carbon-neutral record label, called CarbonZero Muzik, and on a project to supply energy-efficient technologies to communities in rural Kenya. It soon became clear that while those new mixes – and a history of making records as groundbreaking as the infamous double-groove – were synonymous with M and *Pop Muzik*, Robin himself was still very much focused on innovation. ●

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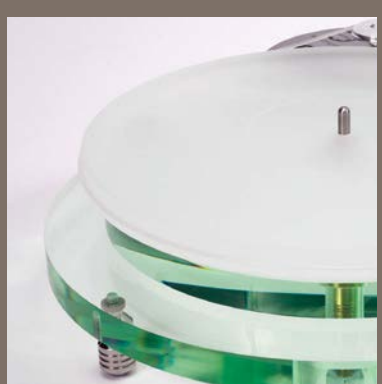

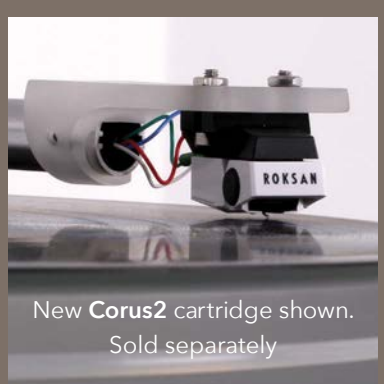

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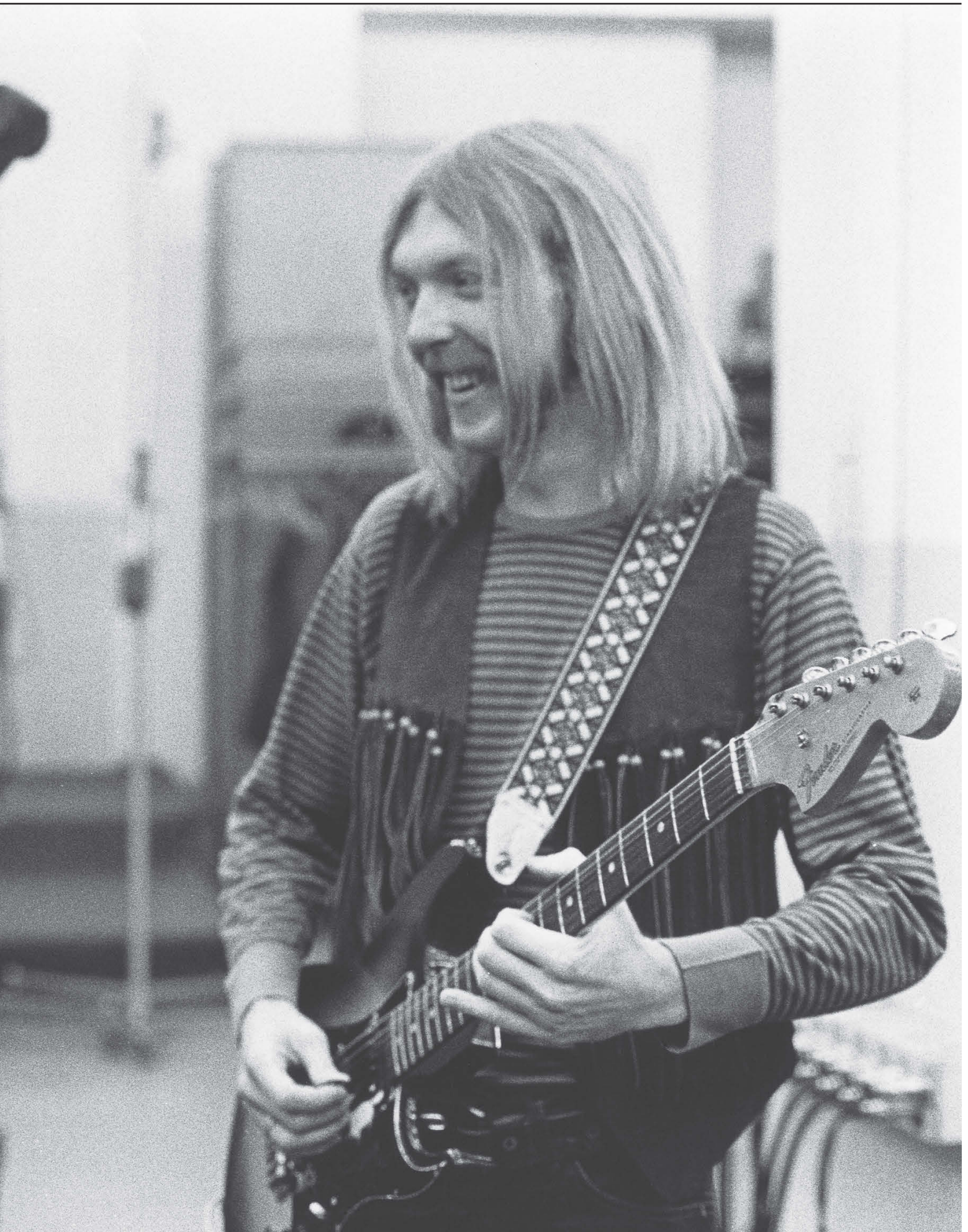
STUDIO
SNAPSHOT

WILSON PICKETT & DUANE ALLMAN

Muscle Shoals, Alabama, 1968

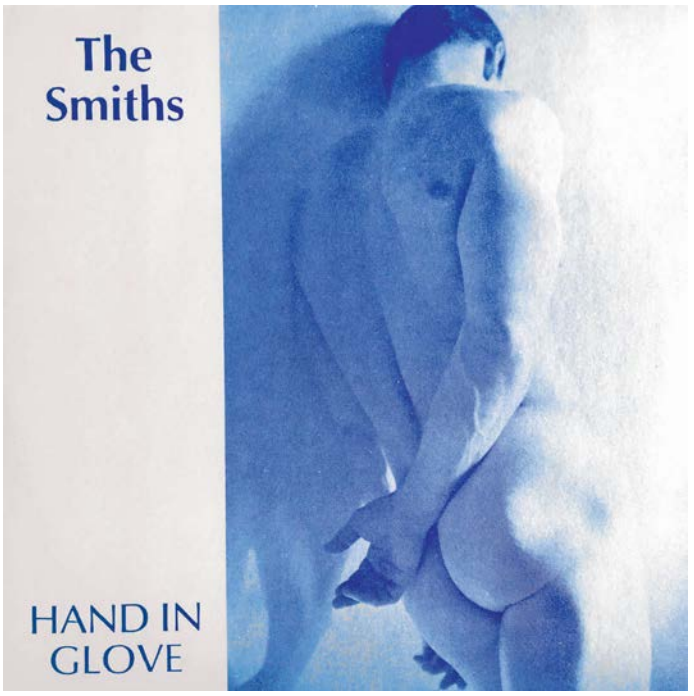
Having not yet formed The Allman Brothers Band, in 1968, Duane Allman was so keen to get a glimpse inside Rick Hall's FAME Studios that he pitched a tent in the parking lot. It worked. Meeting Hall and subsequently Wilson Pickett, who was recording at the legendary studios, Allman hit it off with the R&B legend and landed a job as a session player. Soon, the pair were cutting their own version of the The Beatles' *Hey Jude*. "He stood right in front of me, as though he was playing every note I was singing," Pickett said of Allman's performance. "He was watching me as I sang, and as I screamed, he was screaming with his guitar." It proved to be Allman's big break – Atlantic Records and Eric Clapton were equally keen to know who had played the song's guitar solo, with Hall replying: "Some hippie cat who's been living in our parking lot". That was enough to earn Duane a record deal, and FAME Studios remained central to his own rise to prominence by hosting the auditions for The Allman Brothers Band.



BERNARD BUTLER

The guitar hero, producer, solo artist and collaborator, who hit the charts with Suede, McAlmont & Butler and The Tears, tells **Jennifer Otter Bickerdike** about the first single he ever bought...

"The very first piece of vinyl I bought for myself was the single for *Hand In Glove* by The Smiths. That's really pretentious, isn't it? Oh, The Smiths! But at the time, they shaped everything you wanted to do and be. That band was a world you just dove into; you couldn't get enough of it. People have this image now that they were performing at Wembley Stadium back then, that they were huge; but they weren't. They did one night at Brixton Academy. Radio 1 wouldn't play them. Being a fan was a club, a very private club – that was part of the attraction.

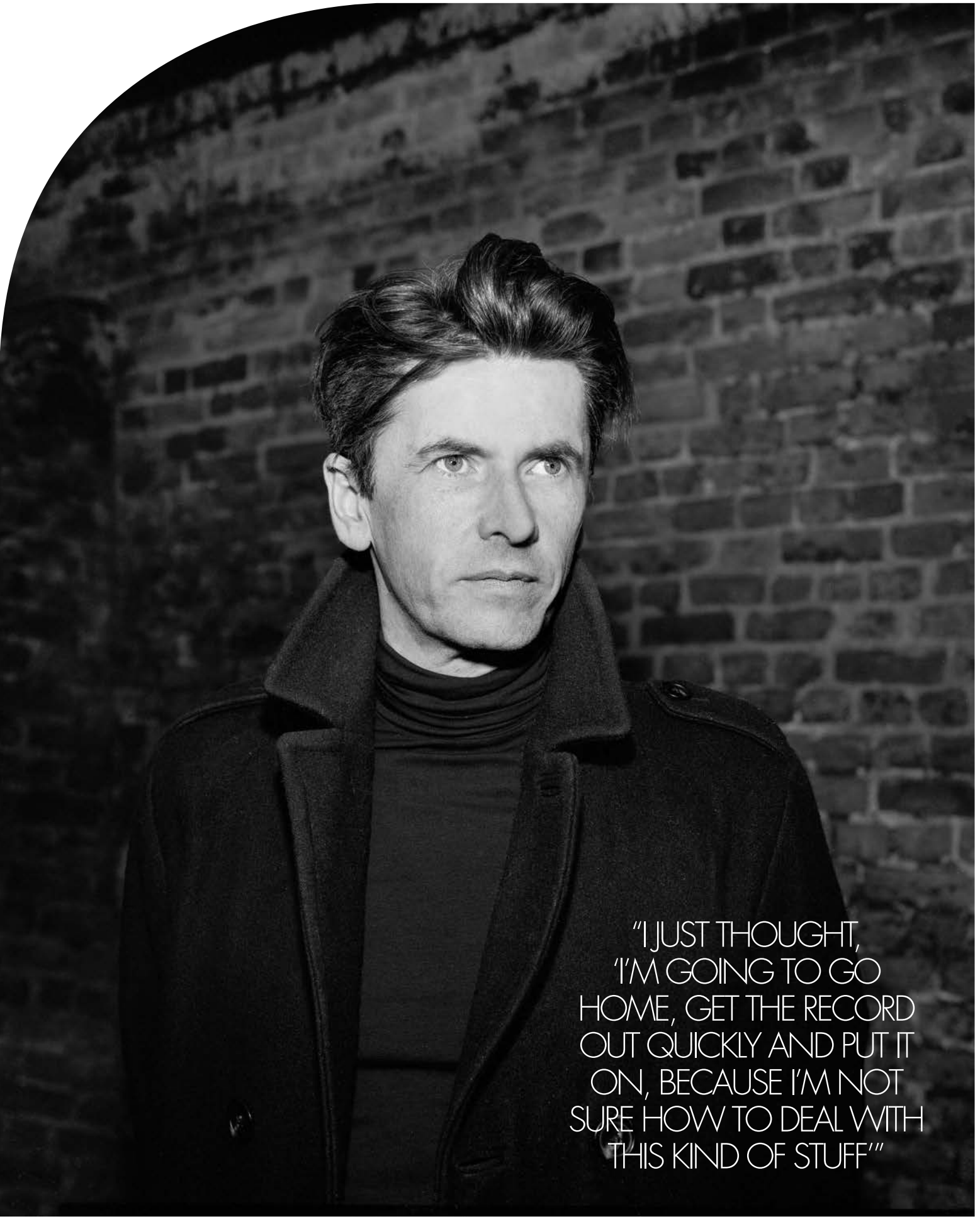


"I first got into them through my brother. I'm the youngest of three boys. When I was growing up, I shared a room with the eldest one. It's the stereotypical story. Through the 80s, he bought records: all of the Rough Trade releases, all of the Factory albums. He purchased them all, so I never had to get any of my own. He got older stuff, too: The Velvet Underground, Lou Reed, Miles Davis, Muddy Waters – all of that from the age of about 11 to 12. I was quite lucky to hear all of those artists early on."

SELL THE GLOVE

"We used to lay in bed and listen to John Peel every night. *This Charming Man* had come out, and everyone saw them on *Top Of The Pops*. The Smiths were pretty pop music. It was melodic and emotional. I'm second-generation Irish; I grew up with a lot of country music in the 70s. All of the Irish people around me were listening and talking about country and western. That style of music is also pretty melodic, emotional and overwrought. When I heard The Smiths, it made sense. *Reel Around The Fountain* was the first thing I heard on John Peel; I remember just saying: 'What is this?'. I was desperate to hear anything from the group. I found out they had another single out, called *Hand In Glove*. I ordered it from a shop in Wood Green that's not there anymore. Back then, you often had to order a record, so you may not know what it looked like until it was in your hand. When it arrived, the sales clerk put it on the counter. It's a silver-and-ice-blue cover with a naked man's butt on it. The clerk looked down at the cover and looked at me. I was like: 'I think that's the one, yeah'. It was just sort of an odd moment for me and surely for the clerk. I just thought, 'I'm going to go home, get the record out quickly and put it on, because I'm not sure how to deal with this kind of stuff'. But obviously, The Smiths sleeves became part of the whole thing – they were beautiful covers."

Bernard has a weekly radio show with Mark Kingston, BB And The King, on Fridays 2-4pm on Boogaloo Radio: boogalooradio.com/bbandtheking. ●



"I JUST THOUGHT, 'I'M GOING TO GO HOME, GET THE RECORD OUT QUICKLY AND PUT IT ON, BECAUSE I'M NOT SURE HOW TO DEAL WITH THIS KIND OF STUFF'"

A 1978 VINTAGE YEAR

It was a time of plenty, and of unbridled creativity, in the pop world. **Ben Wardle** revs up the DeLorean to revisit an amazing year that was pivotal in the development of music as we know it

I know what you're thinking. I'm joking, right? Compared to the triumvirate of 1956, 1967 and 1977, 1978 was a freakshow. There's no pelvis-thrusting Elvis; no *Sgt. Pepper*-era Fabs and no sneering Rotten. No, it's John Travolta in *Grease*, Brian and Michael's *Matchstalk Men And Matchstalk Cats And Dogs*, Terry Wogan's *The Floral Dance*, Boney M., Brotherhood Of Man… I won't go on, I'm depressing myself just writing down the names.

Go to any charity shop, have a rifle through the records and you'll still find *The Sound Of Bread*, *Blondes Have More Fun* and *Nightflight To Venus*. That's because 1978 was the final year in a decade-long run of staggering UK record sales before a slow decline set in. 1978 managed to more than double 1970's 50 million sales, with over 107.3 million, according to the BPI. And that was during an oil crisis, which limited supplies of vinyl. Recorded-music sales would not reach these heights again until 1985, when *Brothers In Arms* and the scramble for CD repackaging supercharged the figures.

Sales levels are no indication of quality. Some might even argue they're inversely proportionate. But think about it: when a business is swimming in cash, those working in it feel freer to take risks; they are more indulgent with creativity and more experimental.

In 1978, change was in the air: disco and roots reggae were both reaching maturity, punk had kickstarted a wave of new talent, the old guard were making an effort and an underground buzz of experimentation and newness was palpable. Singles were so popular that the Top 50 was extended to become the Top 75. *Smash Hits* was launched, marking the beginning of the savvy, ironic relationship with pop music that is still the adopted tone of so many music writers. And for all these reasons and more, it turns out that 1978 gave us pop's greatest year.

But before we start, I have a confession: in November 1978, I turned 13 and went to my first gig: Buzzcocks at Hammersmith Odeon. Afterwards, while I waited for my mum to pick me up, watching Austin Princesses and Ford Capris chugging out towards the Westway, I tore the poster down from the wall outside. Back at home, I Blu Tacked it, still damp, to my bedroom wall. I never let it out of my sight. Now framed, it still has pride of place in the family home.

So yes, I'm biased: 1978 was my first full year of pop music and I cherish all the music I fell in love with then. And it's not just me – a lot of the musicians, DJs, music execs and journalists who continue to shape music's future, came of age in pop's greatest year.

The Clash were in their prime in 1978

Getty

Heavenly Records impresario Jeff Barrett, purveyor of seminal pop for almost 30 years, from the Manics to future classics such as Temples and King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard, recalls 1978 fondly: "I turned 16 in May and started full-time work in June. Terrible job. Forest won the league. Punk rock and Brian Clough…

"1 July 1978 is a date I never forget: the Clash On Parole tour, Leicester Granby Hall – The Clash/Suicide/The Coventry Specials."

Like Barrett, the man who brought us The Jesus And Mary Chain, Primal Scream and Oasis remembers the same tour changing his life: "The Clash at Glasgow Apollo in July 1978 was a fucking amazing show!" says ex-Creation boss turned manager-guru Alan McGee.

Arguably, The Clash playing live was the culmination of the goodwill they'd amassed during the previous year. And while it's true that 1978's eagerly anticipated follow-up *Give 'Em Enough Rope* was a slight disappointment to fans, the fact is the band did release their greatest record – and one of *the* greatest singles – in 1978: the mighty *(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais*.

NEW WAVE OF TALENT

To many, this is the pivotal record of 1978. Lyrically complex and musically genre-defying, it set the benchmark for everyone else who thought it was enough to wear tight trousers and sing in an English accent. Film director Danny Boyle claims he'd tried to put it into most of his films, before finally using it in the *Trainspotting* sequel: "It's the greatest song ever written," he said in a 2013 interview. "I won't hear any arguments about that."

White Man… was pivotal in repositioning The Clash away from punk rock, which had given the industry a boot in the rear in the previous 18 months. Now a lot of those signings were coming to fruition and the word 'punk' had been replaced with 'New Wave', to describe any new artist with short hair and tunes. But despite the vagueness of the genre, New Wave re-established a Beatles-level of succinct tunesmithery, translating the energy of punk into genius pop.

Squeeze's Chris Difford and Glenn Tilbrook would of course go on to produce some well-loved pop music of their own. Back in 1978, they were enjoying their first hit single with *Take Me, I'm Yours*. Says Difford: "1978 was a good year for records. It was our first sailing in the choppy waters of the charts and I think we did okay. We were in good company with The Damned, The Police and Elvis Costello; not to mention Brian Eno."

Eno's 1978 was the beginning of the pop polymath we know today. Yes, he produced the brilliant debut by Akron New Wave misfits Devo, as well as Talking Heads' groundbreaking *More Songs About Buildings And Food*. But he also found time to invent ambient music, releasing his twin masterpieces *Music For Airports* and *Music For Films* in March and October respectively. So, just to be clear, 1978 gave us Brian ruddy Eno in full effect.

Inspired by Eno as well as punk, Swindon four-piece XTC bolted out of the stable in January with the uptight, New Wave masterpiece *White Music*. Frontman Andy Partridge, now long established as one of pop's great songwriters, remembers the year: "1978 was interesting, because after the punk bomb had gone off, we could look around the flattened landscape and say: 'Okay, what sort of a musical world would we like to build now?'. The bang had cleared a lot of ugly furniture out. It was up to us all to decide if we wanted to put something new and beautiful in… or just replace it with different ugly."

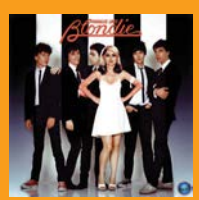
Very much in the former camp is one of 1978's most persistent icons: Debbie Harry. But much more than her image, it is Blondie's third and greatest album *Parallel Lines* that burnishes the gold of 1978: a seamless run of New Wave guitar pop with a tantalising glimpse of where the band would take it next in the shimmering disco-ball groove of *Heart Of Glass*.

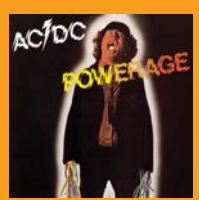
Aside from classic punk debuts such as Siouxsie And The Banshees' haunting *The Scream*, The Adverts' *Crossing The Red Sea With The Adverts* and Buzzcocks' *Another Music In A Different Kitchen*, the most widely acknowledged punk flowering of 1978 was The Jam's *All Mod Cons*.

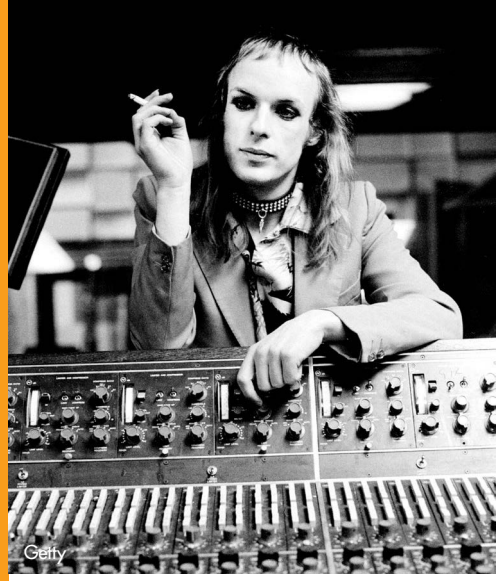
"It had a huge impact on me," says Barrett. "Great songs and a Holy Grail inner sleeve, which served as something of a life map." It was indeed a life map for every late-70s teenager, so efficiently had Weller grabbed the zeitgeist. Without The Jam, the UK's pop map for the next 30 years would have looked entirely different.

GENDER EQUALITY

Punk had liberated musicians of both sexes. While The Slits were morphing from their '77 punk roots and preparing the following year's







Brian Eno was busy inventing ambient music and producing classic records in 1978

reggae-driven *Cut*, other punk females now grabbed the limelight: X-Ray Spex released their amazing *Germfree Adolescents* with Polly Styrene's unique take on 20th-century *weltschmerz* [world weariness]; Fay Fife's strident vocals dominated on *Can't Stand The Rezillos* and Penetration's *Moving Targets* triumphed mainly because of Pauline Murray's precision. These singers, along with the aforementioned Siouxsie, refused to conform to any previous rock role models and began to break down the sexism and bigotry inherent in the music business. Thanks again, 1978.

The most singular voice to emerge in 1978 was also female. On 20 January, her debut single was released and in four-and-a-half minutes suggested a new way forward for pop. Kate Bush had been 'in development' at EMI for three years, but aged 19, she was ready. She would go on to release more groundbreaking albums but her debut, *The Kick Inside*, featuring legendary single *Wuthering Heights* still sounds remarkable 40 years later.

Bush is one of a number of artists who debuted in 1978 and went on to dominate subsequent decades. Not all of them were heralded at the time, but all went on to reinvent the level of international success possible for British artists. Dire Straits hit the ground running with *Sultans Of Swing* and their self-titled debut, but The Police and Prince – both of whom debuted in 1978 – took a little longer. Think about it: even the glory years of the 1960s never

1978 – 10 UNSUNG CLASSICS

1 MARVIN GAYE
HERE, MY DEAR

Recently divorced from Anna Gordy, Gaye had made no secret that he'd recorded the album in order to fund his alimony bills. Released in December, it's a stylistic left-turn which alienated critics and fans. Listen to it now and you'll rejoice that it saw the light of day.

2 THE BOOMTOWN RATS
A TONIC FOR THE TROOPS

Bob Geldof's band ruled UK airwaves in 1978, even managing to knock John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John off the top spot. Yes, they were stealing from Springsteen, but did The Boss have anything as catchy as *Rat Trap*?

3 KRAFTWERK
THE MAN-MACHINE

Arguably Kraftwerk's most succinct and accessible work, it's certainly the album that defined their enduring image, with its striking Constructivist artwork. Says Chris Difford: "I went to see Kraftwerk in 1978. They performed with less technology than a current-day wristwatch, but sounded out of this world."

4 RICH KIDS
GHOSTS OF PRINCES IN TOWERS

1978 was a year for ex-Pistols. An obvious choice would be Lydon's PiL debut, which came out at the end of the year – but *Ghosts…*, from bassist and main Pistols songwriter Glen Matlock, is worth seeking out, too.

5 BRIAN ENO
MUSIC FOR AIRPORTS

Eno accidentally invented ambient music when he was ill in bed. A radio played so quietly that it blended in with the other ambient noises around it. Bingo! It was pop's 'Isaac Newton' moment.

6 PRINCE FAR I
MESSAGE FROM THE KING

The long-awaited follow-up to *Under Heavy Manners* from the sonorous-voiced Rastafarian toaster – or 'chanter', as Far I preferred to be called. While it doesn't quite match his '76 classic, it still set a benchmark for all subsequent reggae.

7 THE WALKER BROTHERS
NITE FLIGHTS

In 1978, Scott Walker had little interest in continuing to peddle the easy-listening fare that had originally made him successful. GTO records were prepared to bankroll another group album, though, and despite half of it treading water, *Nite Flights* contains some of Scott Walker's most remarkable work.

8 THE CARS
THE CARS

Fabulous artwork and crystalline pop perfection combine on Ric Ocasek's fantastic power-pop debut. The production, courtesy of Queen mainstay Roy Thomas Baker, is huge and dynamic – like having the band in your living room.

9 WIRE
CHAIRS MISSING

Many count 1977's *Pink Flag* as one of their favourites but this, the follow-up, is chock-full of frontman Colin Newman's genius, awkward pop.

10 X-RAY SPEX
GERMFREE ADOLESCENTS

Despite a terrible sleeve, with the band trapped inside enormous test tubes, this is a fabulous listen. While it doesn't contain the previous year's überpunk tune, *Oh Bondage Up Yours!*, it is blessed with the brilliant singles *The Day The World Turned Dayglo*, *Identity* and the fabulous title track.

Getty

This guy, pictured here in 1978, was hard at work on *Off The Wall* that year

produced a royal flush like Kate Bush, Prince, Dire Straits and The Police.

Meanwhile, over in the US, another debut was being prepared by a former child star of the early 1970s. Along with his sister, Janet, Michael Jackson was demoing the record which would establish him as the biggest pop star of the next 20 years. Listen to 1978's demo of *Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough* on the Deluxe Edition of *Off The Wall* and even just with basic keyboards and Coke-bottle percussion, the Michael Jackson sound is fully defined.

Van Halen by Van Halen went on to sell well over 10 million copies. One of those buyers was Mike Smith, now managing director of Warner/Chappell Music UK. Smith's roster includes Blur, The White Stripes, Mark Ronson and Arcade Fire. Back in 1978, he was a pre-teen metal fan. "Van Halen's first album was revolutionary," he says now. "It changed rock music forever. What is interesting about '78," he continues, "is that all of the original heavy-metal acts were making records that were taking their key from punk and were more stripped back and exciting. You had live albums from AC/DC, Thin Lizzy and Ted Nugent

SIMON REYNOLDS SAYS THE SHIFT TOWARDS INDIE RECORD-LABEL CULTURE BEGAN IN THE UK IN 1978

that surpassed their studio work to date – aggressive and exciting. Girlschool released their first single *Take It All Away*, which takes the best of rock, metal and punk. Motörhead released their *Louis Louis* EP and AC/DC released *Powerage* and *If You Want Blood*. These three bands were my favourites and encapsulate the influence of punk on metal."

Above all, 1978 nurtured all things new. "It was an odd year," says ex-*NME* scribe turned award-winning comedy writer David Quantick: "Punk became mainstream pop and what we call post-punk was still getting dressed."

In his excellent book about post-punk, *Rip It Up*, Simon Reynolds rightly points out that the whole shift towards independent record-label culture began in the UK in 1978. The year saw the births of Rough Trade, Factory, Cherry Red and Mute. Each of these labels would go on to shape new music and the structure of the international record business. In 1978, their releases were limited, but the handful of records that did come out remain hugely influential: think The Normal's *Warm Leatherette,* which set the template for the minimalist electronic klang of future dance music.

MUSICAL SCHIZOPHRENIA

Indie label Beggars Banquet had formed the year before with two releases from The Lurkers, but it was in 1978 that future 6 Music DJ Steve Lamacq fell in love with them: "I first heard *Ain't Got A Clue* on 'Kid' Jensen's drivetime Radio 1 programme and from then on, they were my band. The first gig I ever went to was in September 1978 – The Lurkers at the Chancellor Hall in Chelmsford."

Lamacq is quick to point out the eclectic nature of 1978: "I enjoyed

Getty

Kate Bush on her 1979 Tour Of Life, showcasing songs from her two 1978 albums

DISCOGS' TOP 10 MOST COLLECTED ALBUMS 1978

1. **Dire Straits** – Dire Straits
2. **Some Girls** – The Rolling Stones
3. **Parallel Lines** – Blondie
4. **Outlandos D'Amour** – The Police
5. **Van Halen** – Van Halen
6. **The Man-Machine** – Kraftwerk
7. **Grease** – OST
8. **The Cars** – The Cars
9. **Darkness On The Edge Of Town** – Bruce Springsteen
10. **Jazz** – Queen

IF 1978 WAS ABOUT THE 'NOW', THEN YOU MUST HAVE FELT DECIDEDLY SHEEPISH IF YOU WERE FROM 'BACK THEN'...

a brilliant year of musical schizophrenia in 1978. There were all these great punk and New Wave singles coming out on a weekly basis, like X-Ray Spex, The Ruts and the debut Siouxsie single. But I also remember buying the 12" version of Evelyn Champagne King's *Shame* – the disco scene was improving by the week in 1978. On top of that, Steel Pulse's *Handsworth Revolution* album came out, still one of the greatest British reggae albums of all time!"

Indeed, both roots-reggae and disco had been fermenting throughout the 1970s, but were now really coming to fruition. Bob Marley's success gave Island Records renewed confidence in reggae, and alongside Steel Pulse were fellow Brits and future reggae superstars Aswad, who put out their second offering *Hulet* and the scathingly political debut album from Poet And The Roots (aka Linton Kwesi Johnson) *Dread Beat An' Blood*.

KING-SIZE REGGAE

The year's crop of Jamaican releases was not shabby either: Dr. Alimantado's *Best Dressed Chicken In Town* remains a classic, as the good doctor toasts wisdom over some of Studio One's finest grooves, and Gregory Isaacs' *Cool Ruler*, while not yet putting the lovers' rock godfather on the map, did at least give him his moniker. Almost as busy as Island Records were Virgin, whose John Lydon-A&R'd Front Line imprint gave us Prince Far I's *Message From The King* and Culture's *Harder Than The Rest*. Let's not forget the deathless *Uptown Top Ranking* by Althea & Donna, which dominated the airwaves throughout the first half of the year.

Disco had enjoyed a successful 1970s, but in 1978, it went stratospheric. Many of the records that still send handbags floorwards were released that year: Village People's *Y.M.C.A.*, Gloria Gaynor's *I Will Survive*, Chic's *Le Freak*, The Jacksons' *Blame It On The Boogie*, Taste Of Honey's *Boogie Oogie Oogie*, Funkadelic's *One Nation Under A Groove*, *You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)* by Sylvester… Not to mention the ubiquitous *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack from late '77, which hung around 1978's album chart for 18 weeks like a squirt of Tramp by Lentheric.

What genre wasn't representing great music in 1978? Well, possibly the old guard. If 1978 was about celebrating the 'Now', then you must have felt decidedly sheepish if you were from 'Back Then'. With the exception of the Fabs' *Rarities* album, which emerged at the end of the year, this period was more Rutles than Beatles. But possibly because of 1978's new breed yapping at their heels, two key bands from the old guard gave us their final best shots.

Like John Entwistle's flares on the cover, *Who Are You* is slightly dated. But it is blessed with The Who's finest hour: the extraordinary title track. It's also graced by an energetic Keith Moon, who died three weeks after its August release. Earlier that summer, The Rolling Stones had put out *Some Girls*, which, despite being a generic hotchpotch of rock, country balladry and disco, still hangs together beautifully, 40 years later.

In 1978, pop music finally grew up. It was a line in the sand between the past (the heady mid 50s, the golden 1960s and the corpulent early 70s) and what was to come in the next 20 years – before the internet, filesharing and streaming would change everything again. Here's hoping we see another year of its calibre. "It was a jamboree of all sorts," says Squeeze's Chris Difford. "I didn't like everything, but I could sense change in the wind." ●

[PIAS] ACTION PRESTON • BADLANDS CHELTENHAM • BANQUET KINGSTON • BEATDOWN NEWCASTLE • BLACK CIRCLE LEIGHTON BUZZARD • BLACKEST RAINBOW SHEFFIELD • CASBAH GREENWICH • CODA PHONICA LONDON • POLAR BEAR BIRMINGHAM • PROBE LIVERPOOL • RAPTURE WITNEY • RAVES FROM THE GRAVE FROME • RECORD CORNER GODALMING • REFLEX NEWCASTLE • RELEVANT CAMBR

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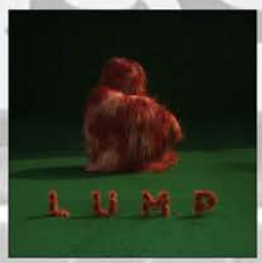

LUMP
LUMP
Dead Oceans

NATALIE PRASS
THE FUTURE AND THE PAST
ATO Records

ARTHUR BUCK
ARTHUR BUCK
New West

GARBAGE
VERSION 2.0
Stunvolume

FIELD DIVISION
DARK MATTER DREAMS
Bella Union

JON HASSELL
LISTENING TO PICTURES
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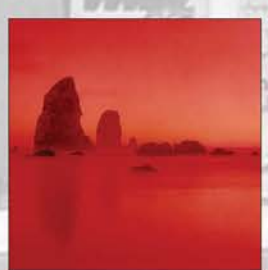
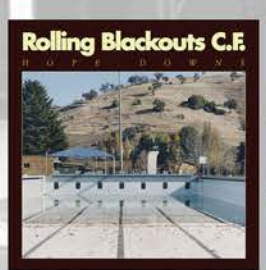
JIM JAMES
UNIFORM DISTORTION
ATO Records

SNAIL MAIL
LUSH
Matador Records



GANG GANG DANCE
KAZUASHITA
4AD



ROLLING BLACKOUTS COASTAL FEVER
HOPE DOWNS
Sub Pop Records

LET'S EAT GRANDMA
I'M ALL EARS
Transgressive

MUSIC EDINBURGH • COOL DISC DERRY • CRASH LEEDS • DAVID'S LETCHWORTH • DIVERSE MUSIC NEWPORT • DRIFT TOTNES • EARWORM YORK • ECLIPSE WALSALL • ELEPHANT WINCHESTER • EMPIRE ST ALBANS • FIVES LEIGH ON SEA • FOREVER RECORDS N IDGE • RESIDENT BRIGHTON • ROLLERCOASTER KILKENNY • ROUGH TRADE BRISTOL • ROUGH TRADE LONDON • ROUGH TRADE NOTTINGHAM • SEISMIC LEAMINGTON SPA • SISTER RAY LONDON • SLIDE BEDFORD • SOUNDCLASH NORWICH • SOUND IT OU

BURY • LOST IN VINYL CAMBRIDGE • MOLD RECORD SHOP MOLD •MONORAIL GLASGOW • MUSIC NOT DEAD BEXHILL ON SEA • NIGHTFLY RECORDS UXBRIDGE • NORMANS LEEDS • PEBBLE EASTBOURNE • PICCADILLY MANCHESTER • PIE & VINYL SOUTHSEA ESTERFILLED • TOWER DUBLIN • TRANSMISSION MARGATE • TRUCK STORE OXFORD • UNDERGROUND SOLUTION EDINBURGH • VENUS VINYL LONDON • VINYL COLLECTORS SALISBURY • VINYL HUNTER BURY ST EDMUNDS • WAH WAH RECORDS WAKEFIELD

T STOCKTON ON TEES • SOUND KNOWLEDGE MALBOROUGH • SOUNDS OF THE UNIVERSE LONDON • SOUTH SOUTHEND • SPILLERS CARDIFF • SPINDIZZY DUBLIN • SWORDFISH BIRMINGHAM • TALLBIRD CH OTTINGHAM • FREEBIRD DUBLIN • FRIENDLY BRISTOL • GATEFIELD SOUNDS WHITSTABLE • HONEST JONS LONDON • HOT SALVATION FOLKESTONE • JAM FALMOUTH • JUMBO LEEDS • LEFT FOR DEAD SHREWS

MADE IN MANCHESTER

Since The Smiths dissolved, Johnny Marr has travelled the world, bringing his guitar-superstar chops to a host of bands' records and finding his voice as a solo songwriter. Third album *Call The Comet*, though, was forged in his home city. **Richard Purden** meets Marr to talk about embracing rock music, record shopping with Morrissey and being influenced by HG Wells…

The May Fair Hotel in London's West End was once famous for high-society ballroom dances featuring Big Band leader Bert Ambrose. Today, it hosts a very different kind of bandleader; at least that's how Johnny Marr describes himself after rejecting previous terms such as 'songwriter' (too "Jackson Browne") and 'guitar slinger for hire'.

Marr admits that no-nonsense self perception has a lot to do with his working-class background growing up as a second-generation Irish kid in 1970s Manchester. It's more than 40 years since he formed his first band, aged 13. After moving from Ardwick to Wythenshawe, once the largest council estate in Europe, he was able to draw upon a notable pool of musicians, which featured fellow Smith Andy Rourke, Billy Duffy (The Cult) and former *Coronation Street* actor Kevin Kennedy.

His trademark black tresses are today fashioned into a feathercut, with lighter streaks summoning Keith Richards' rakish look of the early 70s. Reflecting on a lifetime shaped by vinyl, he remembers his first sighting of the Stones guitarist when looking though the record collection of a friend's parent. "It was the hexagonal sleeve – I've yet to see a more spooky and freaked-out looking band on a greatest hits record [*Through The Past, Darkly*]."

"My parents loved early rock 'n' roll," he explains of his boyhood introduction to vinyl. "We would visit these musty old record shops to pick up old 45s of Jerry Lee Lewis and The Everly Brothers, it was a kind of early retro. You didn't need to be an alternative person or collector, because it was a huge cultural pastime; your auntie would have a lot of records, everybody had a record player – in the way people have laptops now. The charts covered easy-listening people in their 40s and 50s who were very straight. It's not like now, where you have hipster grandmas and grandads. When you went to a friend's house, you would look through the family's records. There was often a lot of dross, but there would be the odd thing – that's how I got into Motown."

VINYL HISTORY

Visiting his favourite record shops is a passion that continues for Marr to this day – Kingbee in Manchester, Jackpot in Portland and Groucho's in Dundee. "I've been going to Groucho's since The Smiths days; I'm glad these places are still around." There is an enthusiastic grin when recalling his first 7", a copy of *Jeepster* by T. Rex. "For my generation, record shops were places like Rumbelows and Barratts that primarily sold record players and washing machines. They were stores selling the hardware and software, to use modern parlance. Later on, I went to places like Black Sedan, which was a bit of a student hangout that smelled of pot – all the good ones did, as I remember.

"Virgin was the first big shop and an important place in town, where musicians stuck up cards with 'singer wanted'. A lot of bands came out of that scene; Joy Division advertised there."

It's that period of Manchester's history that the 54-year-old has revisited; the city of his early teenage years, which predates The Stone Roses, Oasis, Madchester and The Haçienda. "The first solo album (*The Messenger*) was done in Berlin and New York mostly, and in my mind, I can't separate those two places from the record," he explains. "*Playland* is a very 'London' record; that environment shaped the sound."

His third long-player, *Call The Comet*, was recorded in the custom-made Crazy Face Factory studio, which overlooks the Pennines and is named after the clothes shop once owned by the late Joe Moss, who played an essential role managing The Smiths in their foundational year.

Described as a "father figure" by Marr, he also managed the guitarist from 1999 until his death from cancer in 2015.

"I moved into the studio on the day Joe died, which was a strange coincidence. The emotion on the record comes from me being in this big open place, physically surrounded by that landscape, and also me coming out of writing the biog (*Set The Boy Free*)."

Walk Into The Sea might sound like something of a bleak prospect, but the song is about daring to take a metaphorical leap into the water and come out reinvigorated. It finishes with the line: "Hope breaks on me". It's about rebirth, a baptism story of climbing over the cliffs and plunging into the sea and coming out the other end. There appears to be something of Marr's Catholic childhood etched into the grooves. "There is a bit of that, being brought up Irish Catholic. If you have a vivid imagination, there's a gothic quality to a lot of the iconography and an awareness of otherworldly activity, without a doubt."

Elsewhere, Marr describes *The Tracers* as "totally HG Wells". Although he left school at 14, Marr's reading list expanded greatly when "hanging around a lot of bookshops frequented by older guys that went on to shape the late 70s and early 80s, like Ian Curtis, Stephen Morris and Paul Morley. There was an awareness among them of writers like Philip K Dick and William Burroughs."

It was Moss who first encouraged Marr to knock on Morrissey's door four years later, when Marr was only 18. Significantly, the songwriting partnership blossomed over a shared love of records and pop culture. Flicking through Morrissey's collection, Marr opted to put on The Marvelettes B-side written by Smokey Robinson – *You're The One*. "While I was playing and choosing the records, it skipped things along about 20 minutes. If you can imagine it, you're sat in your bedroom and some kid turns up and starts going on about forming this life-changing band.

"He had no idea that was going to happen, that must have been quite trippy, because before I knocked on the door… it was just another Wednesday."

It seems natural that Morrissey and Marr would go on poignant day trips to visit specific record shops. One particular journey had a significant influence on *Strangeways Here We Come*, their final long-player, released after the much-publicised split.

HAND THAT DROPS THE NEEDLE

"Me and Morrissey would go to these record shops on our own, which was really important to us. Around '86, '87, we were already quite big, with a few songs in the charts and it became a real 'thing'. We found a few places, and these trips were like pilgrimages and quite sacred to us; it was something we would look forward to,

JOHNNY FIVE

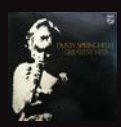
Marr's vinyl choice cuts

IGGY AND THE STOOGES
Raw Power
1973

"This is the one I've never veered from and it's still the yardstick for what rock can be and what it can measure up to. I still listen to it a few times a year."

THE ROLLING STONES
Big Hits (High Tide And Green Grass)
1966

"Essentially, they were a great singles band. This was the cool record your friend's parents had."



DUSTY SPRINGFIELD
Greatest Hits
1979

"All of those singles put together really add up to an amazing body of work that defines a time. I was lucky to grow up with all of those songs around me, like *All I See Is You*, *Little By Little* and *I Only Want To Be With You*. They are powerfully and dramatically sung by one of the best."

BUZZCOCKS
Another Music In A Different Kitchen
1978

"I bought this record the day it came out, after school. I went into town and got the original silver plastic bag it came in. They were already an exciting prospect, not least because they came from my hometown. This was the Manchester of my teenage years: it was modern, tough, androgynous, exciting and underground, but successful – that's the template for a lot of Manchester music."

PAUL DAVIDSON
Midnight Rider
1975

"This is the first single I put on my jukebox when I bought one about 10 years ago. It has one of the best guitar solos of all time for me."

Onstage at the Y Not Festival in Pikehall, Derbyshire, in 2015

and also it would give us a kind of resource, because we were buying records like *Young, Gifted And Black* and a few Bowie and Roxy singles.

"*I Started Something…* sounds unashamedly like Mick Ronson, which comes from that time. It was a sort of thing me and him had going, which reminded everybody that our friendship was to be nurtured – that's what started the whole thing off."

On *Call The Comet*, Marr revisits what he's previously described as the "beautiful melancholy" of The Smiths on *Hi Hello*. It summons both *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* and *Well I Wonder*. "That's good," he says. "I've spent so much time avoiding the past. With *Hi Hello*, it felt so natural. When something has a feeling of honesty, you should just go with it, and that one just poured out. I had to sing about my feelings. As much as it was my intention not to sing about myself, I had to in that. It's a song of unconditional love to someone, it's that thing that all of us know unless we are very unlucky. It could be about a friend, sister, son, daughter or whatever. I had to face this one out with a sense of vulnerability and openness; it turned into a pretty song."

Marr comes from a generation of guitarists whose playing is immediately recognisable; be it Will Sergeant, The Edge or Charlie Burchill, they all share an idiosyncratic singularity. "We were a generation of boys who grew up during that macho, posturing cock-rock period, we

"I'VE SPENT SO LONG AVOIDING THE PAST. WITH *HI HELLO*, IT FELT SO NATURAL. WHEN SOMETHING FEELS HONEST, YOU SHOULD JUST GO WITH IT"

Live image Niall Lea, niallea.com

thought that was redundant. I think all of us were influenced by people like Tom Verlaine and Richard Lloyd. Their approach was modern, and there was a more intellectual and feminine aspect to it."

Marr's signature sparkling arpeggios, minor-key harmonies and flurry of euphoric melodies have added much to modern indie bands such as Modest Mouse and The Cribs. His working relationship with Bernard Sumner in Electronic, too, is one he looks back on with affection. "I learned a lot from Bernard that people might not expect. He employs this approach to song construction called 'working with the lights off'.

"He would rather not know what key the song is in or how many bars certain bits have. He works purely by ear and clock time. Bernard will say: 'Right, we've gone round that part too many times'. A lot of musicians would go back to the first verse of a song, but he would say: 'Why?'. If you know that about him, then you understand the period around '83 to '86, where the song construction is often quite peculiar."

SCORES TO SETTLE

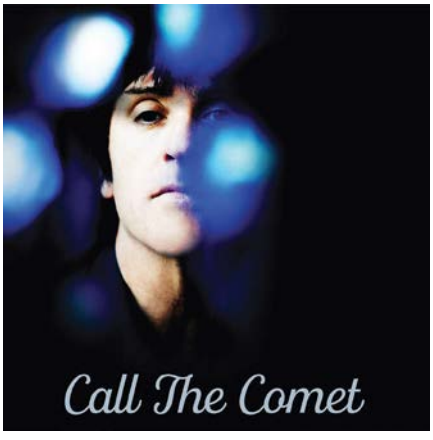
Marr has always been adept at borrowing stylistic elements from his collaborators – and that has continued with Hans Zimmer, when working on the score for films such as *Inception* and *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*. "Hans is the person I'm still learning a lot from at the moment," he says. A collaboration with the actress Maxine Peake has been another good fit. The pair share similar backgrounds, which manifested on *The Priest* – a spoken-word cut from a forthcoming album about homelessness. "I'd asked Maxine to record and she brought in this blog written by Joe Gallagher, a great writer who spent some time living on the streets. I added some music to it. As it was forming, I couldn't believe what we had. The story was so clever, so unexpected. Maxine comes from the position of a young woman on the streets, who was trying to take the high ground by not drinking. She kind of acts on the track, and nailed it immediately."

Over the last five years, Marr has written film scores and a best-selling biography, and is about to launch his third long-player. He's happy to admit *Call The Comet* is a "rock" record, something he's avoided in the past. The approach has allowed a more expressive and confident vocal delivery: "It comes from fronting and singing a lot of gigs and turning it up. I didn't want to push it before and get in people's faces.

"I was probably overthinking it before, but four or five years of doing this has taught me a lot. This is now another facet for me, which I'm happy to take on. I'll always be the guitar player who sings and I'm happy to be so, but I'm less polite about it now." ●

Marr is happy to admit that his third solo album is a "rock" record

"DOING THIS HAS TAUGHT ME A LOT. I'LL ALWAYS BE THE GUITAR PLAYER WHO SINGS AND I'M HAPPY TO BE SO, BUT I'M LESS POLITE ABOUT IT NOW"



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WIRE

"WHEN WE MADE *PINK FLAG*, WE WERE PRETTY HAPPY. WHEN WE DID *CHAIRS MISSING*, WE WERE ABSOLUTELY DELIGHTED… WHEN *154* CAME OUT, THEN IT WAS A LITTLE BIT SCARY, BECAUSE WE UNDERSTOOD HOW FAR AHEAD WE WERE. WE WERE OUT THERE SOMEWHERE ELSE ON OUR OWN. THERE WAS ONLY WHAT DAVID BOWIE AND BRIAN ENO WERE DOING TOGETHER, AND A FEW OTHER THINGS…"

INTERVIEW: SEAN EGAN

Graham Lewis is talking *Long Live Vinyl* through Wire's debut trio of albums spanning 1977 to 1979. Though they are well-regarded records, some will find his assertions of artistic supremacy a little over the top. However, it soon becomes apparent when conversing with Lewis and his bandmate Colin Newman that self-belief is endemic to the long-running punk-cum-avant-garde quartet.

Wire were originally (briefly) fronted by George Gill. When Gill was hospitalised with a broken leg, the group carried on rehearsing and, says Newman, realised: "George's songs sounded better without him in it. Then it became obvious that actually, we'd be better off without him. I suggested I could write songs. Graham said he could write lyrics."

Lewis says of their writing arrangement: "It's unusual that someone writes the tunes and sings them when somebody else writes the words, but I think that often gave things quite a strange juxtaposition."

Not that Newman has ever treated his colleague's lyrics as sacred. "He sends stuff and if I've got something, then I try and find a text that will fit it, but if it doesn't fit, then I just somehow make it fit," he says.

Newman notes that one of the reasons Wire's sound improved post-Gill is that "George used to play endless widdling solos". It provided a valuable lesson, which saw Wire's minimalist path set. "Getting rid of the flab," explains Newman. "Just say the thing that you're going to say."

The classic Wire line-up – Newman on guitar and vocals, Lewis on bass, Bruce Gilbert on guitar and Robert Gotobed (Grey) on drums – debuted on 1 April, 1977. That they did so at the famous Roxy Club gives them impeccable punk credentials, but Wire resist the idea they were punk. Reasons Newman: "I don't think we were really regarded as being a punk band. People saw it as being a development from it. You can say similar things about Siouxsie And The Banshees."

Released on EMI subsidiary label Harvest in December 1977, Wire's debut LP *Pink Flag*

was an instant classic. Although it possessed the sparse sonics and edgy ambience common to the new wave, it also boasted a remarkable breadth. Citing the unsettling trio of *Reuters*, *Strange* and the title track, Lewis notes: "There is a sinisterness and a heaviness and a darkness which certainly interested Bruce and I."

Newman, in fact, was responsible for quite a bit of light in the shape of sweet pop melodies, incongruous for a band known for their radical approach. "I'm personally not embarrassed by that," he says. "I always thought 'the group is not going to go anywhere if they don't have any singles'… I was a huge Beatles fan." He contests that the influence the Fabs had on him is similar to the way that Wire have influenced people: "The Beatles were always looking for new ways to do things and they were not wedded to a particular style of music. The similarities with Wire could not be more obvious."

POSTMODERN PUNK

What's indisputable is that the LP contains at least some punk elements. The furious *12XU* is as iconic among spike-tops as *Anarchy In The UK* or *New Rose*. "It's a staple of punk-rock karaokes, absolutely," concedes Newman, before adding: "*12XU* is postmodern self-censorship. If it was punk, it would be *One Two Fuck You*."

Wire in New York in 2015 (l to r): Matthew Simms, Robert Grey, Graham Lewis, Colin Newman

HOW TO BUY… WIRE

PINK FLAG
1977, Harvest

The minimalist Wire style, which spurned solos and unnecessary repetition, with many of the songs in the same key, ensured their debut contained an astounding 21 tracks. *Mr. Suit* might be preposterously fast and simple, but it's a relative epic compared to 28-second anti-tabloid rant *Field Day For The Sundays*. That the album alternates between unsettling vignettes (*Reuters*, *Strange*), gorgeous pop (*Fragile*, *Feeling Called Love*) and ferocious punk *(Mr. Suit, 12XU*) makes it all the more amazing that so many listeners consider it a 'suite'.

CHAIRS MISSING
1978, Harvest

Pink Flag was a snapshot of a repertoire Wire were bored with. They were already far more excited by the songs for *Chairs Missing*, issued only eight months later. It's less immediate than the debut, but a few spins embed in the listener's affections the fractured beauty of *Marooned* and the industrial scrape of *Sand In My Joints*. Meanwhile, *Another The Letter*, *Outdoor Miner* and *I Am The Fly* are classic pop – albeit manufactured in Bizarro World.

SEND
2003, Pinkflag

Some dispute that *Send* is an album – it bolts four new songs to seven previously released EP tracks – but what else are we to call it? "A triumphant comeback", is the consensus of most, following Wire's second extended break. "Relentless" also springs to mind. The record is defined by walls of deafening, grinding guitar and alternately sneering and agonised vocals. The brutal *Spent* leaves the listener precisely that, while closer *99.9* is fully in the grand tradition of spooky Wire epics.

Wire went full-tilt into *Chairs Missing*, released in August 1978 but already partly written by the time their first album was recorded. "The key track for *Chairs Missing* is *Practice Makes Perfect*," says Newman, in reference to the record's maddening opener. "It's something that is completely new for that moment in time, and it also displays a complete polyphony. As far as we were concerned, 1977 and punk was the dark ages."

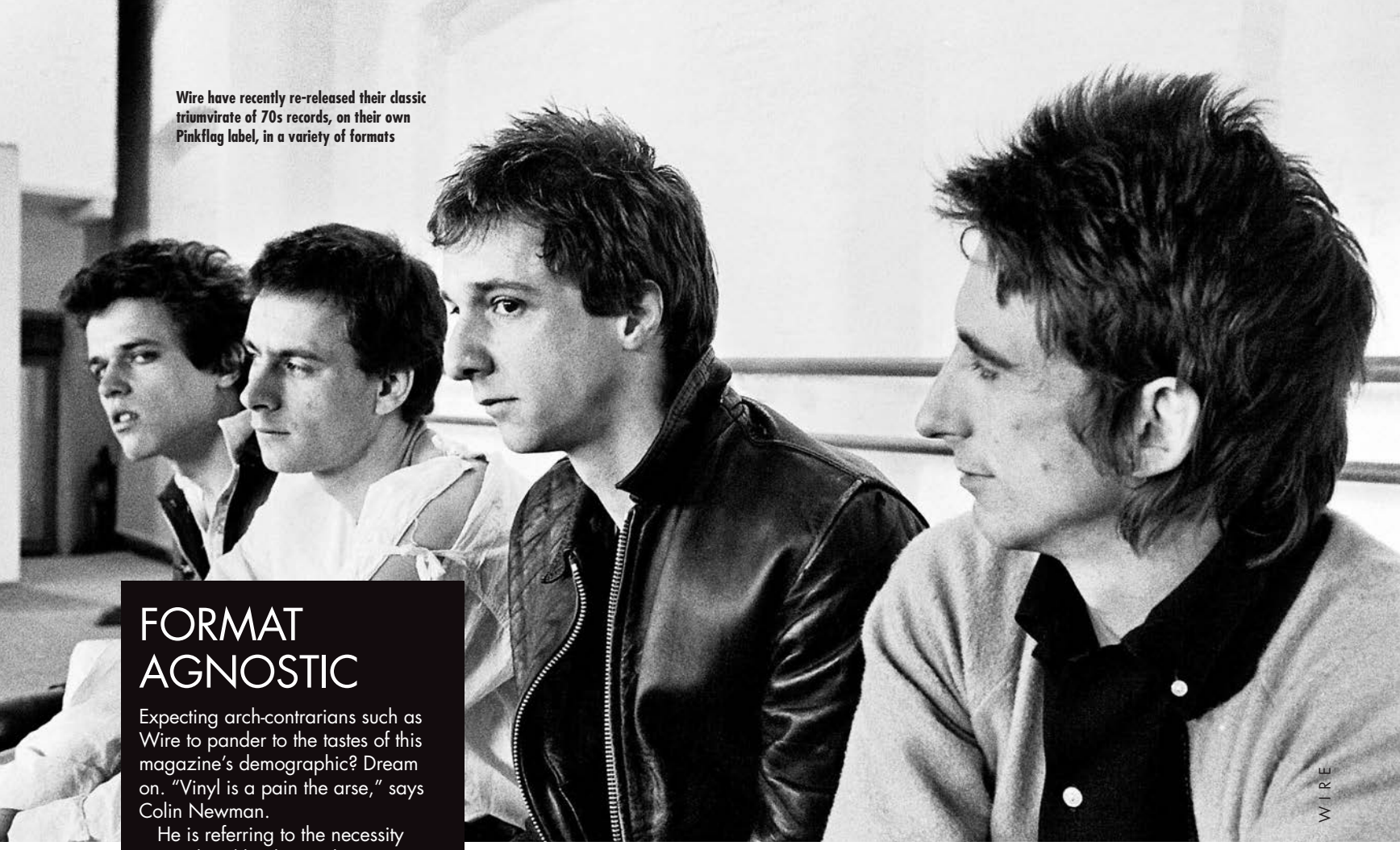
Pop sensibilities were still apparent, though, in the shape of quirky singalong *I Am The Fly*, the demented disco of *Another The Letter*, and *Outdoor Miner* – a lovely paean to, er, an insect. EMI agreed with the band that the latter should be a single, with one caveat. Newman: "From time immemorial, magnum opuses [have been] edited down to fit the three-minutes-30 format of pop radio and this song wasn't long enough, so we had to put a piano solo in it." Such a move could prove to be controversial in sell-out-attuned 1978. "It was a majority vote," says Lewis. "Bruce said: 'I don't want anything to do with it'. Colin was very for it… I felt pragmatic."

The arguments turned out to be all for nothing when the record fell foul of chart-rigging allegations, which EMI denied. "The single was doing exceedingly well when they decided to give it a helping hand," says Lewis. "They were all doing it. It was done completely without our knowledge." As punishment, the disc was dropped from the Top 20 while a *Top Of The Pops* appearance was scuppered.

"The next week, it sold twice as many copies as when it had been in the Top 20 the previous week," says Lewis. "I was absolutely fucking incandescent with rage and anger. They'd fucked it up good and proper."

Nonetheless, Wire proceeded enthusiastically with *154* which, when released in September 1979, made for three albums in under two years. The record found the band venturing further into the territory of the slow, doomy and epic. No Wire album, though, was complete without a concise, postmodern pop song. *Map Ref. 41°N 93°W* featured a cry of "Chorus!" before that section of the composition. The call was actually a mickey-take of producer Mike Thorne, but left in because it would be interpreted as irony, or as Lewis puts it: "You know when you see a painting by somebody and you can still see the pencil marks or measurements which they didn't bother to remove? That's a similar thing."

NO WIRE ALBUM WAS COMPLETE WITHOUT A CONCISE, POSTMODERN POP SONG SUCH AS *MAP REF. 41°N 93°W*



Wire have recently re-released their classic triumvirate of 70s records, on their own Pinkflag label, in a variety of formats

WIRE

FORMAT AGNOSTIC

Expecting arch-contrarians such as Wire to pander to the tastes of this magazine's demographic? Dream on. "Vinyl is a pain the arse," says Colin Newman.

He is referring to the necessity engendered by the vinyl resurgence to plan releases well in advance. "There are no new factories, and everybody and his wife wants to release their record on pink vinyl, especially for Record Store Day. The factories are clogged up and it takes forever, so if you want to release a record on the first of January, you would have to have everything ready six months before that."

As a consumer, Newman says he listens to music most when driving. "You can't have a record player in the car. It just streams from my phone over Bluetooth." For his part, Graham Lewis says: "I find use for all formats. I have a deck at home. I listen to CDs in my car. I listen to MP3s. It's convenience."

The three iconic Harvest Wire albums reissued in May include vinyl editions, but Newman says: "For me, the format which will be the strongest is what we call the 'special edition', with the music delivered on CD. You've got all the extra tracks that you won't have on any of the other formats or digital and you have an 80-page hardbound book." He adds: "As a creative person, I think you have to be 'format agnostic'. People consume music the way that they want to consume it."

The three Harvest albums transpired to form a neat, self-contained segment of Wire's career, for there would be no new Wire product until eight years had elapsed and a change of label effected. Considering that the three LPs had yielded incrementally superior chart positions, this turn of events was the last thing the public expected.

Says Newman: "They said that we could do another album with them which they would pay for, but they wouldn't give us an advance. We didn't sell enough records to pay back the advances that we'd got from EMI, so we literally were making no money." Naturally, he also attributes the dissolution to Wire's genius: "The band has its own internal logic and there was a moment in which one person became very frightened by what was happening. The reviews that we had for *154* basically said we are 'the band of our generation'. One review said: 'This is what Bowie and Eno are trying to do'. You can't get better than that."

"We didn't split up," demurs Lewis. "I know Colin thinks they wouldn't give us an advance. It's not true." Lewis claims instead that the band walked away intact from a record company they were fed up with. "Nobody said: 'That's the end'. Colin went to make a solo record, Bruce and I started making the Dome records [and] got involved with making gallery installations, working with contemporary dance. Everybody was busy."

A DIFFICULT 80S

Although *The Ideal Copy* (1987) saw Wire resume product release on Mute, Newman says: "We had a difficult 80s." Some might suggest the same applies to the 90s, when the band could only muster three albums and temporarily lost drummer Gotobed. However, few would dispute Newman's assertion: "I think Wire came back with a vengeance in 2003 with *Send*."

Despite losing Gilbert in 2004 – replaced first by Margaret Fiedler McGinnis, then Matthew Simms – Wire are back with a vengeance. With three albums in as many years, their recent productivity approaches their furious late 70s pace. It's slowed only because they don't want to create confusion about 2018's reissue of the Harvest trio, whose rights have been bought by their distributor for release on their own Pinkflag label.

Both men say Wire would never countenance signing to an outside label again. "We thought we had a really good plan," says Lewis, "and we thought we'd produced the good work to realise that plan, and they fucked it up." However, he also reflects: "Subsequently, we've had an existence and a career which is not parallel to anybody else's. Who knows? If it had all gone according to plan, perhaps we wouldn't have ended up doing as many kinds of different work. In the end, that's what we wanted to do." ●

RAISING THE BAR

Texan singer-songwriter Josh T. Pearson has enjoyed a warm reception in Europe, yet he's struggled to peddle his art back in his home country. But with the release of his second album, *The Straight Hits!*, that could all be set to change. **Laura Williams** finds out more...

After several years in the wilderness (again), Josh T. Pearson has emerged from a cocoon of self-doubt as a beautiful, colourful butterfly – with albums brimming with new and varied material under his bright-white cowboy hat.

Unrecognisable from the bearded, sober, yoga-loving introvert of 2010/11, Pearson became reacquainted with a razor and booze, learned to dance and love again, and hasn't looked back. "It's been a great few years," he says. "It's so different to the first 40 years."

After living in Europe for several years in the late 2000s – London, Berlin and Paris – Pearson achieved cult status with his only solo record, 2011's *Last Of The Country Gentlemen* – Rough Trade's Album Of The Year. It's a heartbreaking story of love and loss, delivered intensely, by a man on the brink.

"We worked the *Last Of The Country Gentlemen* record for a year or two in the UK, then came back to America and no one wanted me, so I just moved back out to the desert in the middle of nowhere, Texas, and stayed there for a year or two," he recalls. "I kind of thought life was over, and then a friend said: 'Come visit me in Austin', and he invited me to this bar called The White Horse and I walked into the bar and I felt the universe had made a bar specifically for me. I spent a year or two there, learning how to dance and on the road to recovery, and I've come a long way. I was so in my shell and self-aware, and dancing was so liberating for me."

JOSH, I'M ONLY DANCING

Dancing isn't the only change Pearson has made since moving to Texas. Drugs, liquor and love started to feature in his new life. "I don't wanna say I don't drink anymore, but I don't drink any less. I incorporated it back in my life two or three years ago again and there have been a couple of close calls. I did fracture my foot recently. I tripped over a whisky bottle. There was some miscommunication about who had the keys, where they were and why I was locked out of the house, where my leather jacket was and where my phone was. Other than that, it's been okay."

Perhaps the most obvious change is in his appearance. Pearson started shaving for the first time in well over a decade, ditching the facial fuzz to create a dramatic visual transformation. "I started trimming the hair back and went all the way with it," he says. "I hope a few of the older fans stick around. I know they're gonna be sad to lose the beard. They're like: 'We like the beard, dude', well go grow one yourself – it's like 15 years of growth. It is annoying having to shave every day, but I'm good lookin', so it helps."

COUNTRY PUNK

Humour has always been a part of Pearson's life, even in those darker days. While playing *Last Of The Country Gentlemen* live, he would intersperse his dark, brooding set of songs with crude jokes, to stop him slipping into a black hole. Jokes about ducks, drummers and Willie Nelson were commonplace.

On the subject of Willie Nelson, Pearson recently recorded a song with The Texas Gentlemen called *All My Friends Have Met Willie Nelson, So Why Can't I?*. "It's like this country-punk thing," he laughs. "It's really cool. It's a hit. I've never met him, but all my friends have. I need to change that. That's why I wrote this damn song. He's gonna get old and die and that's gonna frustrate the heck out of me that I haven't met him.

"The latest Willie joke?" he teases. "Why are divorces so expensive? 'Cause they're totally worth it". It's a joke that cuts close to the bone

FIVE PILLARS OF THE STRAIGHT HITS!

1 All songs must have a verse, a chorus and a bridge. "That's pretty straightforward," says Josh.

2 The lyrics must be 16 lines or less. "For me, I think a good song is around four-to-five minutes long. 16 lines is good. Mine tend to be about 35 to 50, normally."

3 They must have the word 'straight' in the title. "Once I'd decided on the 'straight' word that was an obvious one, 'cause it gave me something to latch onto."

4 The title must be four words or fewer, because it: "doesn't require a lot of emotional drilling".

5 They must submit to song, above all else. "That's my rule for all music – do as she tells you, the creative goddess with a capital 'She'; a feminine energy which creates and births stuff."

for Pearson, who has undergone divorce counselling to make sense of the painful break-up which inspired his last album.

"I'm so glad I'm divorced now," he says. "It was painful at the time, but years later, it's so clear that we were not suited. I'm grateful now. It was a blessing that that tragedy happened. It's all a journey. Albeit a very painful journey."

EVIL ROBOTS

Once a deeply religious man, Pearson likens love between two people to the love between himself and God, struggling once again to balance faith and life. He says: "Me and God, we don't talk so much anymore. It seems to be weighted with the same amount of resentment and hate as most love affairs have. I don't know where we stand. Maybe we're taking some time apart. We're on a trial separation, the Lord and I.

"If God would let me off this crazy thing and let me crack out some records, there's some really fun stuff comin' – political stuff. This is gettin' crazy. Donald Trump's our president."

As we discuss Trump, we briefly lose our phone connection. "Donald Trump has his evil robots listening," laughs Pearson. "They're comin' for us!"

Pearson was at the US Embassy in London during the presidential election in 2016. He says: "It was unsettling; I've never seen the country so divided. A responsibility seemed to shift within me – like, where are the people really stepping up to spread joy?

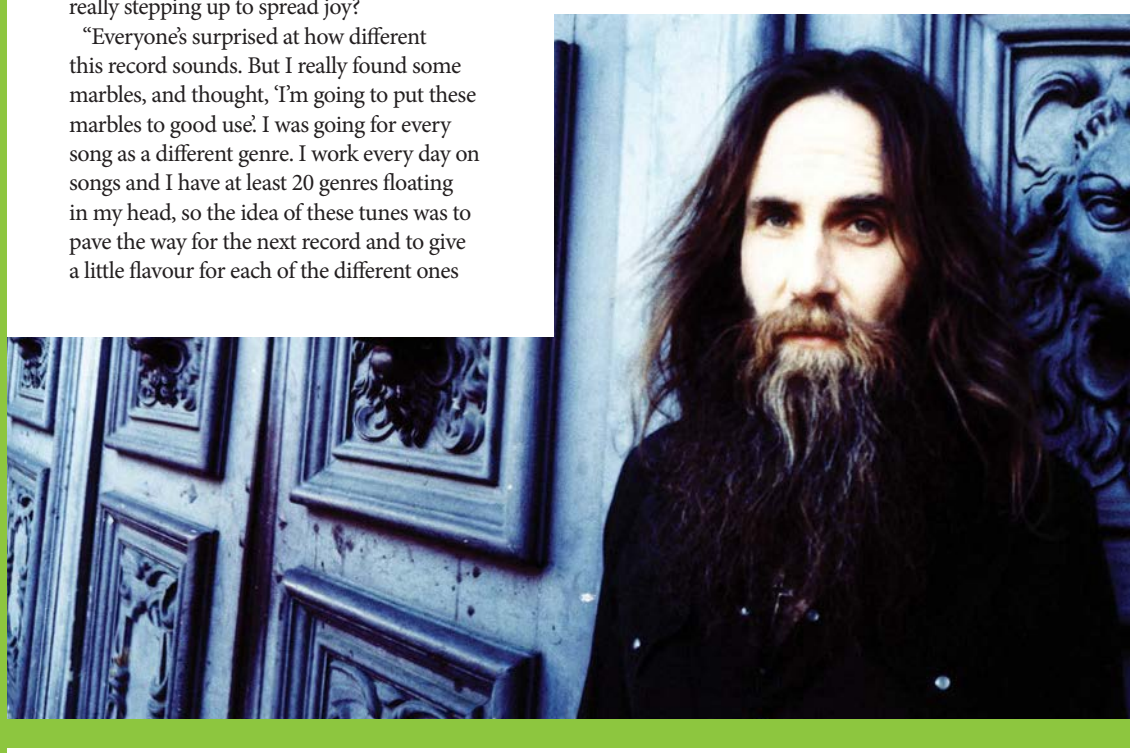
"Everyone's surprised at how different this record sounds. But I really found some marbles, and thought, 'I'm going to put these marbles to good use'. I was going for every song as a different genre. I work every day on songs and I have at least 20 genres floating in my head, so the idea of these tunes was to pave the way for the next record and to give a little flavour for each of the different ones inside of me. "I know my output hasn't been copious – I try to put out a record once every seven-to-10 years," he jokes. "Rome wasn't built in a day and all that! But now, I'd really just like to start cranking out one or two records a year. I really do have the material."

Featuring nine songs which stick to the Five Pillars mantra (see boxout), *The Straight Hits!* takes you on a journey – from the in-your-face country-punk opener *Straight To The Top!* to the folkier *Dire Straights Of Love* and everything in between. Asked what his favourite off the new album is, Pearson reveals it's *A Love Song (Set Me Straight)*.

He says: "That's the one song that really strikes a chord. That's more Josh T. Pearson, the real me: the others, by design, don't go too far down to a deeper insight – but that one's personal."

In 2017, Pearson reunited with his former band Lift To Experience and was faced with the biggest crowd they've ever played to at Green Man Festival in Wales – something he could only dream of in his home country.

"I've always had a warmer reception in Europe," he says. "I can't get a gig over here to save my life. They don't like me. I don't think



This is what "15 years of growth" looks like, beard aficionados

I'm country enough to be country. There's been no one to really champion it over here.

"I started doing these Monday-night gigs in my local bar. Really low key, no advertising and it's been good. We'll see what happens. I think America's in an age now where it would like what I'm doing. I may be too optimistic about it, and I may get the middle finger, but I think it could be time where I can start playing over here – it would be a good thing not to have to cross an ocean to get a gig."

He tells us how important Bella Union was in those early days – Simon Raymonde and Robin Guthrie signed Lift To Experience to the label on the strength of a performance at South By Southwest in 2000 – but he's found his forever home in Mute. He says: "It was a real godsend to us to have someone interested and put out a double disc, that's so special. I'll be forever indebted to Bella, but Mute seemed like a better home for where I was headed with stuff."

THE BIG PINK

The new record, which is being shared with European audiences via a spring tour and a series of Rough Trade gigs, is released on limited-edition pink-coloured vinyl – and is available in that format only from independent retailers (you can download it and buy the CD elsewhere, but the pink vinyl will require a trip to your local record shop).

The former man in black reveals that pink is his favourite colour, which makes him very excited about this record. "It's awesome," he says, "I'm so excited about it. I love vinyl. It's the best thing ever. I like to put the vinyl in the oven over a coffee can and make fruit bowls."

Sacrilege, we suggest. "What if it's a record you hate?" he replies. Good point.

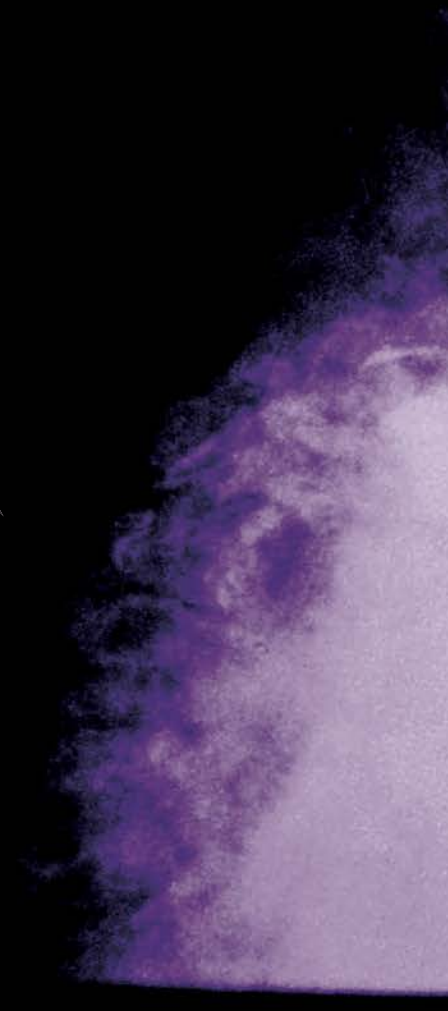
We wrap up the conversation to allow Josh some more of the 15 hours' beauty sleep he was raving about at the start of the call. "Thanks so much for your encouragement," he beams. "*Long Live Vinyl*! Yeah! Hey, you know, I was kidding about making little fruit bowls. I was trying to be funny. *Fresh Fruit For Rotting Vegetables* by the Dead Kennedys, that would be a good record to make a fruit bowl out of." ●

"WE'RE TAKING TIME APART. WE'RE ON A TRIAL SEPARATION, THE LORD AND I"

PRINCE

THE DAZZLING DECADE

From his prodigious teenage years to his untimely death in 2016, Prince proved himself to be one of the most staggeringly talented and prolific artists that the music world has ever seen. The 10 albums he released from 1978 to 1988 contain his most stunning creative work. On what would have been his 60th birthday, **Neil Crossley** salutes a singular genius…



Had events conspired differently, the staggering musical trajectory of Prince Rogers Nelson could have spluttered to an abrupt halt on 26 January 1980 when he made his first national appearance on venerable US TV music show *American Bandstand*. After a slick and sensual performance of his first single *I Wanna Be Your Lover*, veteran presenter Dick Clark stepped up on stage, microphone in hand, to ask the 21-year-old a few questions.

What happened next was in stark contrast to the dynamic performance the audience had just witnessed. As Clark proceeded to ask the nascent star a few rudimentary questions, Prince seemed completely overawed, barely able to utter a word, shifting uncomfortably and staring intermittently at the floor.

One of the millions watching on TV was his friend and musical mentor Pepé Willie – who lost no time in confronting Prince about the interview after the broadcast. "I go like: 'What the hell happened to you man?'. I was yelling at this guy. He said: 'Pepé, it all hit me at one time. Millions of people were watching me'. He got stage fright. And at that time he said to me: 'That will never, ever happen again.'"

Such an experience could have crushed a lesser artist. But Prince had fierce drive and self-belief. Within five years, he was on the verge of global stardom, going on to notch up over 100 million album sales in the course of his career. Prince spanned rock and R&B to create a sound that helped define the 80s. It was this era that would provide his lasting musical legacy.

TEEN PRODIGY

Prince was 16 years old when word began circulating about his prodigious talents. "There were these hushed conversations about this 16-year-old kid who was the next Stevie Wonder and could play all these instruments," recalled Dez Dickerson, lead guitarist with Prince from 1978 to 1983.

Born in Minneapolis on 7 June 1958, Prince was immersed in music from the outset. His father, John Nelson, was a jazz pianist and leader of The Prince Rogers Trio. At the age of seven, Prince wrote his first song, *Funk Machine*, on his father's piano. In 1972, he formed the band Grand Central with high-school friend André Cymone. A stint with the band 94 East followed, before Prince came to the attention of aspiring manager Owen Husney.

Husney landed Prince a six-figure deal with Warner Bros. In an early meeting, the label announced gleefully that it could secure Maurice White, of Earth, Wind & Fire, to produce Prince's debut album. "Prince and I walked out of the room and he said: 'Nobody's producing my first album'," recalled Husney.

"I'm thinking 'Gee, I have to tell one of the biggest record labels in the world that somebody of 17, who's never made an album before, is going to produce his own album'."

Warners were not happy with giving their newly signed artist full creative control, but relented. "They were gracious enough to allow me a very wide palette to put colours onto," reflected Prince two decades later. ▶

Getty

Getty

Prince playing beloved live venue the First Avenue Nightclub in Minneapolis, in 1983

NEW-WAVE FUNK

In June 1978, Prince released his debut album *For You*. Already, his songs were infused with the sexual wordplay that would become a staple of his work. The album sold 350,000 copies and reached No. 12 in the US R&B chart. The follow-up album, *Prince*, released in October 1979, yielded his first major hit *I Wanna Be Your Lover*, which went to No. 11 in the US Billboard charts and entered the Top 50 in the UK.

By now, Prince had formed his first tour band – featuring old friend André Cymone (bass), Gayle Chapman (keyboards), Matt 'Doctor' Fink (keyboards), Dez Dickerson (guitar) and Bobby Z (drums). His first two albums featured a highly accomplished brand of funk and soul. But in creative terms, they were utterly unremarkable. That all changed in 1980, with the release of his third album, *Dirty Mind*. This was the record on which Prince really found his direction, incorporating the sharp, minimalist sensibility of new wave with his own distinctive brand of sexually infused funk.

It was his first masterpiece. Gone was the doe-eyed romanticism of his first two albums. On *Dirty Mind*, Prince set out with an overtly confrontational manifesto, penning sexually explicit lyrics for tracks such as *Sister* and *Head*.

The album was widely acclaimed by critics, who defined his sound as 'new wave funk' or 'post-disco funk'.

"Nothing could have prepared us for the liberating lewdness of *Dirty Mind*," wrote Ken Tucker in *Rolling Stone*.

SYNTHS AND SAMPLERS

Once Prince had unleashed *Dirty Mind*, there was no stopping him. As one writer put it: "Prince was made for the 80s and the 80s were made for him". He was seriously funky, pop-friendly and at the forefront of artists who blended traditional rock instruments with synthesisers and samplers. In 1981, he released *Controversy*, a stopgap album that continued the sonic recipe of *Dirty Mind*, yet yielded the iconic title track and the sublime *Do Me, Baby*.

Mainstream success was still some way off, a fact highlighted when Prince and his band played two calamitous support shows with The Rolling Stones in San Francisco and were pelted with shoes and chicken innards by the audience.

But in October 1982, Warners released what would become his breakthrough: the double album *1999*. This was the first album credited to Prince And The Revolution, the band that now featured Mark Brown (bass) and Lisa Coleman (keyboards) in place of Cymone and Chapman. It was also the first album to fully embrace synthesisers – most notably the Oberheim OB-SX and the Linn LM–1.

ARMAGEDDON TIME

Released at the height of the Cold War, the theme of the title track – and indeed the album – was simple: if nuclear annihilation really is nigh, then fuck it, let's party. The album opens with a slow, robotic voice: "Don't worry, I won't hurt U," it intones, "I only want U to have some fun." And so it begins, a gleeful, enthralling slice of artfully arranged synth pop, distinguished by multiple lead vocals and exuding Prince's sublime pop craftsmanship: "I was dreamin' when I wrote this, so sue me if I go too fast/ But life is just a party and parties weren't meant to last."

The title track reached No. 12 in the Billboard charts, while the singles *Delirious* and *Little Red Corvette* entered the Top 10. *Little Red Corvette* was one of Prince's most potent

EXPLICIT LYRICS

Which Prince track led to 'Parental Advisory' stickers on LPs?

Prince was aware that to succeed in the mainstream market, he would need to curb the explicit sexual nature of some of his lyrics. But that didn't stop him including the *Purple Rain* album track *Darling Nikki*, which had the line: "I met her in a hotel lobby masturbating with a magazine".

These lyrics were a source of concern for 'Tipper' Gore, author, social issues activist and then-wife of the 45th US vice-president Al Gore, who had risen to prominence through her work with the Parents Music Resource Centre (PMRC), an organisation that was lobbying for the introduction of warning labels on records with profane or violent lyrics. "I bought the *Purple Rain* album for our 11-year-old and I didn't know that *Darling Nikki* was on it," Gore told the 1985 Congressional Hearing into song lyrics. "I felt it was inappropriate for her… I had no warning – all I knew was that Prince was the new creative teen idol on the scene."

The film *Purple Rain* carried an 'R' rating in the US, which deemed that only people of 17 years old or over could watch it, but the album had no such guidelines. As a direct result of *Darling Nikki*, the Recording Industry Association Of America (RIAA) introduced warning stickers for records that contained explicit sexual or violent content. The 'Parental Advisory: Explicit Lyrics' sticker was born…

MTV AND THE CROSSOVER MARKET

Prince's broad appeal

"I will never leave Minneapolis," Prince once said of his native city. "It's so cold it keeps the bad people out." But in the 70s, when Prince was starting out, options were limited there for African-Americans looking for a career in music. Back then, just 3% of the city's population was black, which meant that any African-American artist hoping to succeed had to have crossover appeal for a white audience. This required immense talent, ambition and self-belief – attributes that, fortunately, Prince had in abundance.

Even when he was on the verge of stardom, mainstream national and international success still involved crossing over from the black R&B market to a white demographic. It took the release of *Little Red Corvette* from the 1982 album *1999* for Prince And The Revolution to achieve this. The track received heavy rotation on the emerging MTV and was the channel's first crossover hit.

"MTV was as much a product of the ethnically segmented marketplace as anything," said The Revolution guitarist Dez Dickerson in the BBC documentary *Prince: A Purple Reign*. "But two things happened: Michael Jackson had Eddie Van Halen play on a song called *Beat It* and then right behind it, *Little Red Corvette* broke. And between those two songs and videos, that was a significant shift. I just remember very literally seeing the impact that the song was having reflected in the make-up of the audiences in our shows. Every night, the audience was getting whiter and whiter as that song was playing in the charts."

fusions of rock and funk, and the track received heavy rotation on the new MTV channel.

Prince undertook a six-month tour to promote the *1999* album, which was a monster hit, going on to sell over four million copies. The follow-up album, *Purple Rain*, was to transform him into a global superstar.

PURPLE PARTY

Released on 25 June 1984, *Purple Rain* was the soundtrack to the semi-autobiographical film of the same name. The story was flimsy and absurd, but it was the stunning live performances within it that attracted movie-goers in their droves.

Sound-wise, the album defied genres. Gone was the sleazy synthesised funk, replaced by a new, fuller rock, pop and soul hybrid, featuring searing guitars and Linn LM-1 drum machine-driven tracks. Central to its success was the first single, *When Doves Cry*, with its sparse and innovative mix. The impact of the track was heightened by the fact that it had no bass.

When Doves Cry, and the follow-up single *Let's Go Crazy*, topped the US singles charts – but it's the album's title track that remains seared in most people's minds. *Purple Rain* was one of three songs recorded live at a benefit show on 3 August 1983 at the First Avenue Club in Minneapolis. It was the live debut of 19-year-old Wendy Melvoin, who replaced Dez Dickerson on guitar in The Revolution. The eight-minute-long track is an absolute masterstroke – an anthemic rock ballad that's as affecting as it is powerful. "I never meant to cause you any sorrow/ I never meant to cause you any pain", Prince sings of his father. It was the album's high point – a timeless, epic *tour de force*.

The album went on to sell well over 25 million copies worldwide and

On the *Purple Rain* tour at the Carrier Dome in Syracuse, New York, March 1985

SOUND-WISE, *PURPLE RAIN* DEFIED GENRES. THE SLEAZY SYNTH FUNK WAS REPLACED INSTEAD BY A NEW, FULLER ROCK, POP AND SOUL HYBRID

Getty

On the 1980/81 *Dirty Mind* tour: André Cymone, Prince, Dez Dickerson and Bobby Z

Getty

THE BLACK ALBUM

The 'Funk Bible' that proved 'too evil'

By the late 1980s, rumours were abounding about Prince's large stockpile of unreleased material. This material was allegedly stored somewhere in the depths of his Paisley Park studio complex, in an area dubbed 'The Vault'. Prince once claimed to have 320 finished songs in this vault, which was where the proposed masters for a 1987 album called *The Black Album* were held. A disc of hard-and-heavy funk, this album seemed to be Prince's reaction to criticism that he had become too pop-orientated, and an attempt to regain his credibility with his black audience.

The album, sometimes dubbed 'The Funk Bible', was due for release on 8 December 1987, but was withdrawn by Prince at the last moment, when he deemed it too "evil". Warners released it in 1994 as his 16th studio album.

Days after it was withdrawn from the stores, the album emerged on the streets in bootleg form, and is one of music's most legendary bootlegs since The Beach Boys' aborted *Smile* project in 1967. The 1987 promo-only release had no printed title, artist name, production credits or photography printed. As its title suggests, the album featured a simple black sleeve.

On promotional copies, only a song listing and catalogue number – *25677* – were printed on the disc itself. The commercial version was intended to have only the catalogue number, printed in pink, on the spine. In April 2016, an original promo copy from 1987 was sold on Discogs' marketplace for a record $15,000.

In the music video for *Alphabet Street,* a subliminal message appears on screen that reads: 'Don't buy The Black Album, I'm sorry'.

is widely regarded as one of the best albums in music history. "I always said," Prince told MTV in 1985, "that one day I would play all kinds of music and not be judged by the colour of my skin, but by the quality of my work."

EFFORTLESS AND ASSURED

Ever the innovator, Prince changed direction yet again, in 1985, for the album *Around The World In A Day*, a psychedelia-infused work which topped the Billboard chart and yielded the singles *Raspberry Beret* and *Pop Life*. This was followed a year later by *Parade*, an album featuring music from the movie *Under A Cherry Moon*. "The sound of Prince at his most effortless and assured," wrote Simon Price in *The Guardian*. "Nobody would guess it was the soundtrack for a sub-par film."

The album also yielded the single *Kiss*, with its stripped-down minimalist sound, which gave Prince his third No. 1 in the US and reached No. 6 in the UK singles charts.

Prince went back on the road with the *Hit N' Run – Parade* tour, which included three nights at Wembley Arena. But it was the end of the line for The Revolution. When the tour ended, he dissolved the band.

SPRAWLING MASTERPIECE

By now, Prince was ensconced in his new $10m creative complex, Paisley Park, and working on a proposed triple album to be called *Crystal Ball*. Warner Bros forced him to trim the record to a double album and on 31 March 1987, he released his ninth studio LP, *Sign 'O' The Times*.

It was a sprawling masterpiece, his creative zenith, and the most diverse and accomplished record of his stellar 80s run of albums. While spanning rock, folk, hip-hop, jazz and outright

"PRINCE WAS TO POP MUSIC OF THE 80S WHAT DAVID BOWIE HAD BEEN TO THAT OF THE PREVIOUS DECADE – ITS SOLE AUTHENTIC GENIUS"

PURPLE GAIN

Discogs' Top 10 all-time most-collected Prince records

10 Prince (7,679)
9 Batman Motion Picture Soundtrack (7,826)
8 Dirty Mind (8,536)
7 Controversy (8,884)
6 Lovesexy (9,633)
5 Parade (13,205)
4 Sign 'O' The Times (15,103)
3 Around The World In A Day (16,528)
2 1999 (19,205)
1 Purple Rain (45,160)

funk, *Sign 'O' The Times* was ultimately genre-defying – a testament to his relentless innovation.

Lyrically, Prince continued to pursue the twin themes of sex and spirituality, but social issues are what define the album's sublimely understated title track. "In France a skinny many died of a big disease with a little name/ By chance, his girlfriend came across a needle and soon she did the same".

Released as a single in February 1987, *Sign 'O' The Times* was a huge hit on both sides of the Atlantic. The rest of the album more than lives up to the title track. *The Cross*, *Housequake* and *Starfish And Coffee* are among his best work.

CREATIVE PEAK

In December 1987, Prince was on the verge of releasing an album since dubbed *The Black Album*, but changed his mind at the last minute, deeming its content to be too dark and immoral. The album, which was eventually released in 1994, features intense, hard-funk epics such as *Le Grind* and *Rockhard In A Funky Place*.

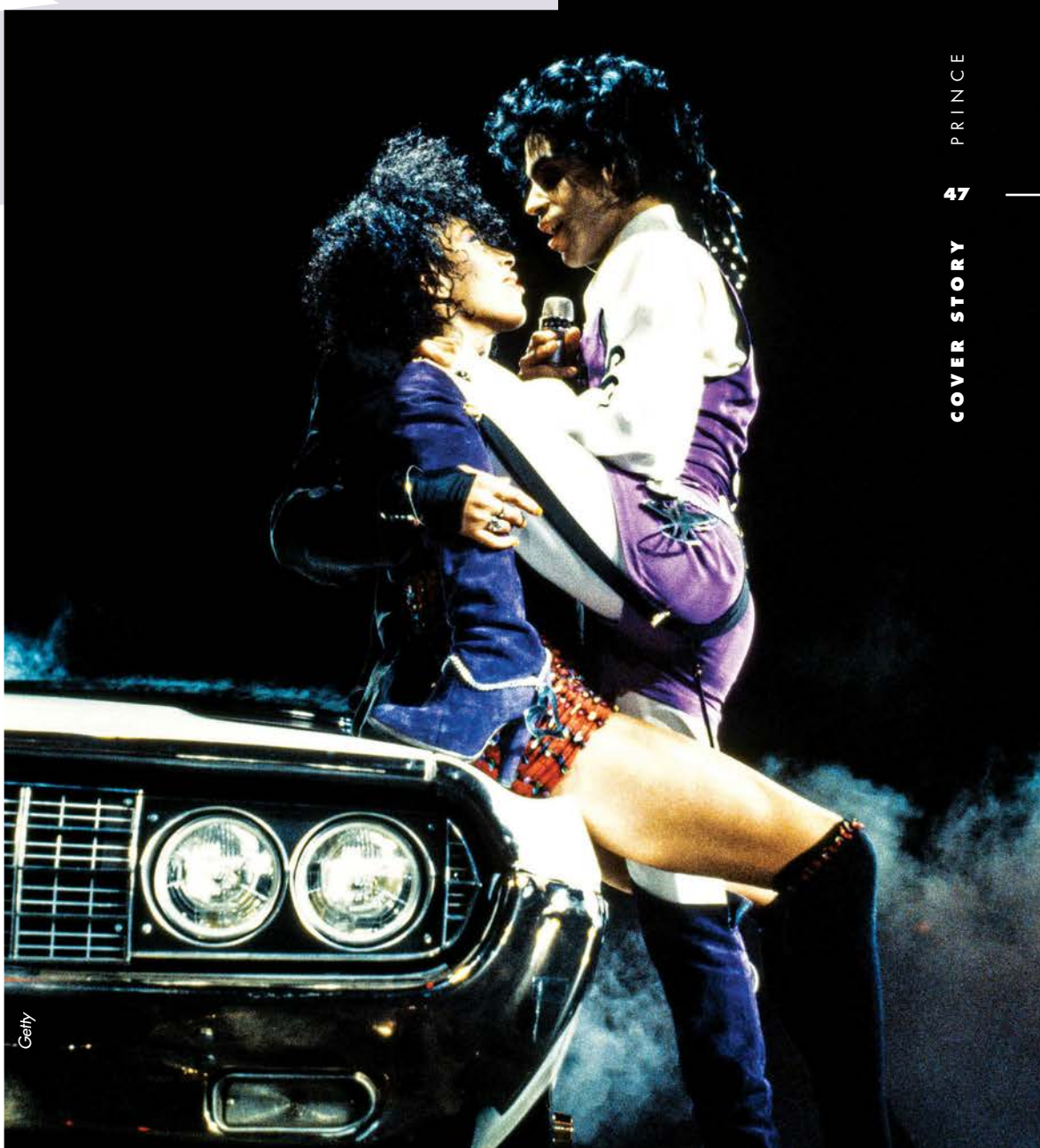
In May 1988, as he approached his 30th birthday, Prince released his 10th studio album *Lovesexy*, proof once more that here was a man with a ferocious work ethic and talent to burn. The collection of nine tracks sounded like nothing else at the time – bold, brash, exuberant, heavily rhythmic and deeply funky.

The album yielded the single *Alphabet St.*, which along with the joyful, spiritual *Eye No* demonstrated his finely attuned dance sensibilities. *Alphabet St.* was a worldwide Top 10 hit, but the follow-up singles *Glam Slam* and *I Wish U Heaven* failed to reach the Billboard Hot 100. While his least successful release in the US, it was No. 1 in the UK, and the record and *Lovesexy* tour were both critically lauded. The album quickly became a favourite of die-hard fans and was a creative landmark. But it was to be the last great album from his golden era.

THE LEGACY

In the hours and days following the death of Prince Rogers Nelson on 21 April 2016, music critics and contemporaries sought to define the man and his musical legacy. Prince's output was by no means flawless, but for much of the 80s at least, he barely put a foot wrong. From *Dirty Mind* through to *Lovesexy*, every album he made was different from the last – innovative, expansive, and always rich in indelible hits.

"Certainly, there were singers who sold more records or gained more awards," wrote Neil McCormick in his obituary for Prince in the *Telegraph*. "Yet none had as much influence or creativity as he, none broke as many rules as he, nor did so with such effortlessness and such showmanship. Prince was to pop music of the 80s what David Bowie had been to that of the previous decade – its sole authentic genius." ●


Getty

With Cat Glover during the *Lovesexy* stage show in Frankfurt in 1988

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COVER ART

Andrew Dineley looks at Prince's sleeve-design highlights, largely from the earlier part of a close to 40-year career. Befitting an astonishing catalogue of music, the designs were as diverse as the music they packaged…

3

In 1978, just as punk was very publicly running out of steam in the UK, Prince's first album was released. It arrived to very little fanfare; at the time, the music scene comprised mainly a confusing muddle of angry revolutionaries, refugees from the disco era and a few pioneering 'new wave' artists, all ready to be the next big thing. Prince, it turned out, would possess a little of each of these characteristics, along with many more compelling musical attributes.

The cover design of the first album, *For You* 1, was deliberately enigmatic and understated. It depicted simply the artist in a motion-blurred, over-saturated headshot taken by Joe Giannetti.

In an interview with Liz Raiss for *Fader* magazine, Giannetti offered some insight into the development of this first cover design. "He was just beginning when I was hired to shoot the *For You* album cover. At the time, there weren't a lot of makeup artists who understood how to do makeup for [black] people. But he had found someone who knew," he said.

"[Prince] had a giant afro and made it clear he wasn't going to cut it, so the hair kind of dictated [the cover]. He came in with two of his friends. All three of them were very at ease with doing this, which was a great relief, because a lot of the other people who were there were kind of uptight."

During this formative period, Prince's record label would purposefully promote him as the new Stevie Wonder – a credible newcomer who produced, arranged, composed and played all the musical instruments and sang his own material. The 'dust cover' was even credited as being designed by Prince, one of few creative areas that he would relinquish and delegate to other people during his career.

Within a couple of years, Prince had gained enough confidence for a brave restyle, daring to be so different that his image alone demanded that you take notice or else risk missing out. In 1980, he released the album *Dirty Mind*. 2 Its title inevitably dictated a considerably more risqué package than

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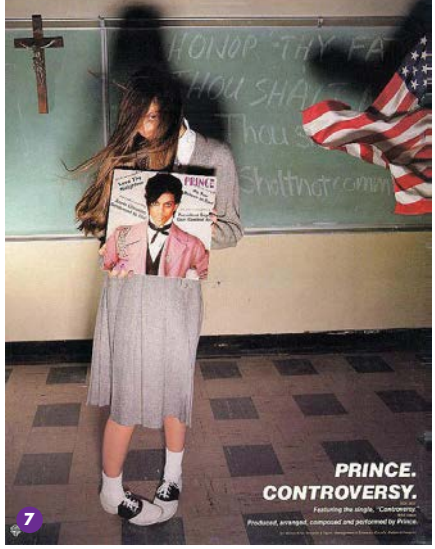

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I just can't believe all the things people say. Controversy. Am I black or white? Am I straight or gay?

LYRICS FROM *CONTROVERSY*

For You and spawned a challenging stage costume for live performances in that period. The black-and-white cover photograph, taken by Allen Beaulieu, immediately did its job as intended.

With underground fame and notoriety now secured, Prince was becoming established as a maverick, if not a hitmaker in every territory – yet.

The cover showed him striking a defiantly sexual pose, the first of many that would challenge ingrained perceptions of masculinity and femininity. Wearing little but black panties and a raincoat, reminiscent of a 'flasher mac', he's seen posing in front of a background of bedsprings. Is he pimp, prostitute, neither or both?

This iconic image remains arresting to this day. Also of note is the inner-sleeve group shot 3 that shows possibly the strangest street gang in record-cover history. The band members are lined up behind their leader, Prince, each confidently working a variety of fiercely divergent looks; from masked surgeon to 2 Tone rude boy, businessman to hustler. These grainy images, combined with handwriting and spray-painted text, set a new tone for the music and signalled a further shift in direction. As if the imagery alone wasn't enough, some territories felt it necessary to add a warning sticker about the album's lyrical content, urging "Programmers, please audition prior to airing". Similar warning stickers often also appeared on Prince's singles, including the sleeve of *Gotta Stop (Messin' About)* 4.

While on tour in Europe, Prince attended a party at The Embassy Club in London. It was hosted by Steve Strange, who went on to front the band Visage and spearhead a new romantic movement of 'gender benders' and peacock pop players. Prince was said to have been fascinated by the experience and would go on to further appropriate the more flamboyant elements of what he'd seen into a look that would eventually emerge during his *Purple Rain* period.

Controversy 5 couldn't have been a more apt title for the next album in 1981. At first glance, the cover appeared considerably more restrained; the same raincoat appeared, with Prince fully clothed, standing in front of controversial newspaper headlines. Any fears that our purple-clad hero may have gone mainstream, however, were immediately allayed upon seeing the free, large-format poster that came with the album. It showed a pouting Prince showering, posed next to a strategically placed crucifix 6.

A promotional poster for the album was also designed for use in the music press 7. This, too, lived up to the album title, showing a schoolgirl nervously clutching a copy of the album surrounded by three of the sacred icons of mainstream American culture: the flag, the holy cross and a biblical passage, written large on a classroom chalk board. Controversy indeed.

In 1982, Prince released *1999* 8, the album that finally launched him into the global mainstream. It became one of the year's best-selling records in the USA, and spawned worldwide charting singles *1999* and *Little Red Corvette*. Finally, he was a household name. Interestingly, *1999* was the first of Prince's albums not to include a

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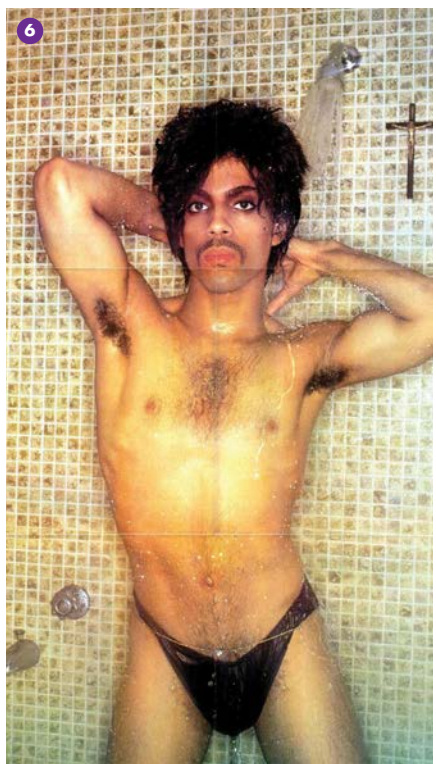
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prominent photograph of him on the cover. Its bold design instead featured a naïve rendering of his name and the album title. It was also the first sleeve to reference his backing band, The Revolution, albeit obliquely, handwritten backwards on the cover only (with no mention on the labels or album spine). Keen-eyed observers may have noticed that photographic elements from the previous album cover – his eyes, Rude Boy badge and gold coat studs all featured within the design as cut-up and collaged elements.

1984 saw the release of *Purple Rain* 9 – the album and the single. Prince was also transcending the music genre by embracing Hollywood with a movie of the same name. With a credit now also rightfully in place for The Revolution on the album sleeve, Prince 'the brand' was firmly established. It was during this period that many of the iconic elements we now associate with his oeuvre were consolidated. Use of the colour purple was established, and symbolic icons would appear for the first time as subtle details on the motorbike he sat astride in the cover photograph, taken by Ed Thrasher.

It was a variant of the male/female symbol that would eventually become a replacement for his name, but during this period, it was given considerable prominence on the sleeve of a Japanese double album entitled *Strange Tales From The Rain* 10. This rare set was issued to radio stations in advance of the movie's release and contained the entire movie soundtrack with contributions from Apollonia 6, The Time and others – not just the Prince tracks that were on the commercially released soundtrack.

With the next album, *Around The World In A Day* 11, Prince And The Revolution embraced psychedelia and headed off in an unexpected direction musically and visually, leading to some of the best record sleeves of his career. With its gatefold sleeve and wraparound tracklisting detail, the *Around The World In A Day* cover was a lavish affair. At the time, Prince said: "The cover art came about because I thought people were tired of looking at me. Who wants another picture of him? I would only want so many pictures of my woman, then I would want the real thing. What would be a little more happening would be if there was some way I could materialise in people's cribs when they play the record. I don't mind [the album being called psychedelic], because that was the only period in recent history that delivered songs and colours."

Doug Henders' lush cover painting encapsulated the experimental mood of the album perfectly. It featured an array of characters – some laughing, some crying, all of them utterly intriguing – positioned around a pool with a ladder stretching from its depths up to heaven above.

The psychedelic mountain range in the background is actually the silhouette of a naked woman. Look more closely, and it becomes apparent that one of the summits is actually a nipple. There's so much symbolism in this cover design that it really warrants a feature all of its own.

Several of the characters gained lives of their own on the sleeves of the singles that came from this seminal release. The white-haired weeping woman, the woman wearing the beret and the flag-waving baby featured on *Pop Life* 12, *Raspberry Beret* 13 and *America* 14, respectively. The *Paisley Park* single was released in limited quantities as a shaped picture disc 15. The paisley-patterned version, used on standard formats, went on to be used as the logo for Prince's Paisley Park label, a subsidiary of WEA Records.

13

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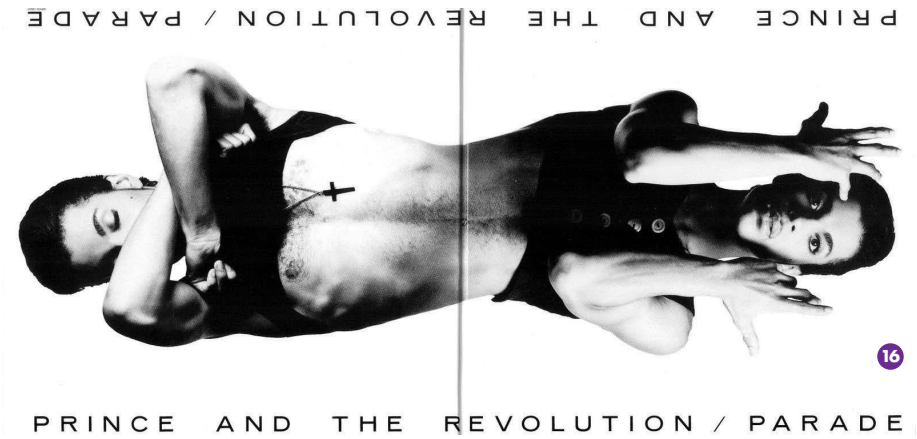
15

11

In 1986, Prince completed yet another stylistic *volte-face*. *Parade* 16, a soundtrack released three months before its film *Under The Cherry Moon*, couldn't have been more different from what had been released just one year earlier. Illustrations, colour and whimsy were summarily replaced with clean typography and monochrome portrait photography by Jeff Katz, who would go on to become a regular collaborator and was also responsible for the amber-hued scene on the cover of 1987's *Sign 'O' The Times* 17. The image depicts career remnants strewn across the stage set of the concert film of the same name. This would be all many fans would see of this period in a live setting, because many dates, for which fans were encouraged to "wear peach and black", were cancelled.

The hard-not-to-notice album cover for *Lovesexy* 18 grabbed Prince headlines across the world before people had even heard the songs. Many familiar motifs –



florals, nudity and the colour purple – were re-ntroduced by fêted video director and photographer, Jean-Baptiste Mondino. He was commissioned to photograph Prince for what would become the artist's most infamous album cover. The image is said to reference Botticelli's *The Birth Of Venus*, but it was the tumescent flower stamen that grabbed most people's attention. The combination of these elements was too much for some retailers, who ended up selling the album from under the counter or in a plain black cover sleeve.

This was particularly ironic, considering that *Lovesexy* was the first album to be released after Prince's aborted *Black Album*, which would have been released in a plain-black cover.

At this point in Prince's career, his conflict with his record company had reached a critical point, and this coincided with an apparent lack of interest in his cover art, too. Perhaps it all got too big to manage, with different territories requiring different treatments. Perhaps it was less of a priority, with the music having to come first as he struggled with his well-documented legal and contractual complexities. While there are still some visual gems among his album covers from this point on, they do become fewer and farther between.

Some highlights from the later part of Prince's recording career include 1992's *Love Symbol* 19 album. For this release, his name was replaced boldly by a futuristic hieroglyphic, based on the hybrid male/female symbol that first appeared on the sleeves of *Purple Rain* and 1990's *Graffiti Bridge* 20, the soundtrack to his final feature film. The *Rainbow Children* album cover 21 from 2001 featured prominently a beautiful painting by Cbabi Bayoc, an acronym for Creative Black Artist Battling Ignorance and Blessed African Youth Of Creativity. At first glance, Prince seems absent, but closer inspection reveals a photograph of him standing in front of the repeated image. He can also be seen at the edge of the cover, effectively hidden in the spine of the format. This painting was created specifically for the album cover, but was based on one of the artist's existing pieces.

In 2009, Prince released two albums at the same time –*Lotusflow3r* 22 and *MPLSoUND* 23. These were available on CD exclusively from Target stores in the USA, but fans across the world were able get hold of the tracks online as Prince continued to adapt to the digital revolution, independently of the big players such as iTunes, Amazon and Spotify. The website dedicated to these releases offered exclusive content, including merchandise and tickets to live shows, along with several online-only exclusives.

The uncredited designs of these albums are an homage to record releases from the 1970s by artists who would have been an influence on the young Prince; probably a deliberate visual indication of the funk-rock direction that he would continue to explore until his untimely death in 2016. ●

"Most of the figures are characters in the songs, but I think some of the people Prince wanted are parts of himself, so they're somewhat autobiographical. The little puppy was added because Prince got himself a dog while on the road"

DOUG HENDERS ON THE *AROUND THE WORLD IN A DAY* COVER

THE ESSENTIAL

Prince

His tragic passing in 2016 left behind a rich, enormously complex canon of material and releases to sift through. **Rik Flynn** presents a guide to Prince's rarest and greatest moments

His sales may have waxed and waned a little over the years, but during his 57 years spent on this Earth, Prince never stopped striving to outdo himself and everyone around him. Compulsive and entirely unafraid to do exactly as he pleased, he lived constantly on the edge, with his songwriting and production, often at the risk of losing our attention. As his trusted engineer Susan Rogers once opined, he was someone "who was willing to completely offend his core audience" for the sake of his art. Few others could make that claim.

Prince put himself through the mill in other ways, too, cutting songs on a daily basis, while often fasting and with very little sleep. Such was his grand vision that he squandered his entire three-album advance on his first record and almost burnt himself out in the process, after months of writing, producing and performing everything himself. Right through to his final hurried burst of activity gigging and recording live with 3rdEyeGirl, his two *HitnRun* albums, storming London with those unexpected guerilla shows, and on to his poignant stripped-back Piano & A Microphone tour, Prince never stopped. Preferring his chosen artistic medium to anything else life had to offer, here was a man truly possessed. "I am music," he told *Rolling Stone* in 2014.

Across his vast, multifarious catalogue, exist numerous studio albums, enigmatic releases under several different guises, plus a dizzying array of incredible singles – many of which have been issued in an equally disorientating number of variances and formats. Add to that the various compilations, collectable promos, picture discs and rarities, and it amounts to a mountainous tip of an even more colossal iceberg, much of which remains boxed up within the walls of Prince's infamous 'vault'.

PURPLE PATCH

Prince Rogers Nelson, perhaps above all artists, is the slipperiest of quarries for a feature such as this. Such is the admiration for the Purple Prophet, that there are superfans willing to lance their replica 'love symbol' guitars deep into your soft tissue should a discrepancy occur. Hip devotees Hot Chip even wrote a song about the dangers of feigning fandom for the man. As a result, we've enlisted those very fanatics for guidance, as well as record-store owners, musicians and anyone in earshot who had an intimate relationship with the many works of the late, great Lord Of Paisley Park.

The result – in reverse chronological order – is an ambrosial mix of genuinely essential albums everyone should own in some form or other; a handful of equally crucial singles; our pick of his many jawdropping extended mixes (many of which feature prominently here); some vinyl-only UK releases and a smaller proportion of rarities to get any collector's juices flowing… For vinyl fans, Prince's alternative reality is a fine place to be.

40 NOTHING COMPARES 2 U

(LTD 7" 2018)

While Sinéad O'Connor's ubiquitous rendition still stands up, Prince's duet with Rosie Gaines never quite fired, while the version cut with The Family is almost entirely overlooked. Finally, we all get to witness this grand opus as it was originally intended. Penned during a burst of creativity at his Flying Cloud Drive Warehouse, Prince's engineer Susan Rogers places it in her Top 10. Out on limited 7" picture disc and standard 7".

Rarest N/A

39 CHELSEA RODGERS

(US PROMO 12" 2007)

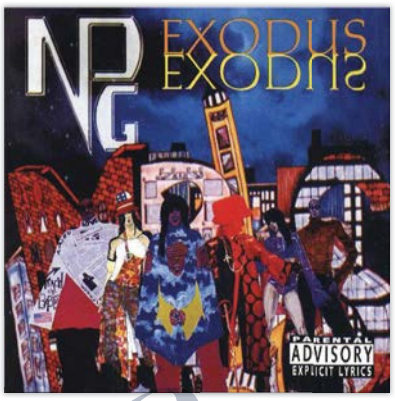
Fierce disco magnificence featuring NPG newbie Shelby J on vocals, this is a hidden gem from *Planet Earth*, available only as a vinyl promo. Written about a mystery model, Sheila E sits in on percussion here and one-time James Brown cohort Maceo Parker is on horns. This one may be a little rare, but decent copies regularly appear on online auction sites. B-side *Mr. Goodnight* is worth a mention, too.

Rarest N/A

38 3121
(PROMO 2006)

From the octave-shifted everything of the title track and the salsa scats of lead single *Te Amo Corazón*, to the robotic, eroticised funk of *Black Sweat* and the (slightly) more familiar territory of third and final single, *Fury*, experimentation was still high on the agenda. New protegée Támar Davis added her tender pipes to *Beautiful, Loved & Blessed* and duet, *The Dance*. For vinyl lovers, there was only this – hotly debated – 'promo'…

Rarest **N/A no vinyl, bar promo**



36 EXODUS
(NEW POWER GENERATION ALBUM 1995)

In the middle of his battle with Warners, Prince made this album cast as alter-ego Tora Tora (named after a Japanese war cry). Prince is omnipresent, but offers only two vocals: new power-soul jam *The Exodus Has Begun* features a heavily slowed down vocal, foiled by NPG bassist Sonny T. (who sings the rest of the LP) and atop the watertight P-Funk grooves of *The Return Of The Bump Squad*.

Rarest **1995 sealed/mint £200+**
Latest **£50+**

34 LOVESYMBOL
(1992)

Borne out of frustration with his label and brazenly displayed on the sleeve came The Artist Formerly Known As Prince's new moniker. The public may have been confused, but this sizzling blend of R&B, jazz, hip-hop and even reggae fared well. This cryptic rock soap opera starring a princess, a rock star and seven assassins housed *7*, one of his most extraordinary creations, plus *Sexy MF* and the then-confusing *My Name Is Prince*.

Rarest **Sealed first pressing £150**
Latest **1992 £15**

37 MUSICOLOGY
(PROMO 2004)

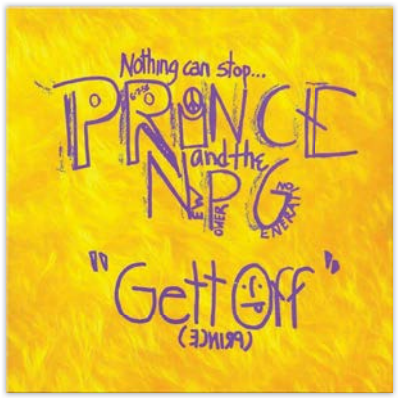
While the debate rages as to the legitimacy of this rare promo, it's worth digging deep. R&B is the focus, although its trio of singles operate in all quarters. The sizzling title track spits the history of funk set to syncopated cadency and plenty of James Brown-isms; *Call My Name* is luscious soul, while *Cinnamon Girl* rides a propellant groove. Deep in the pocket, *Illusion, Coma, Pimp & Circumstance* slips out of line to bring the funk.

Rarest **N/A no vinyl, bar promo**

35 THE GOLD EXPERIENCE
(1995)

Infamously painting 'SLAVE' on his cheek at the BRITs in 1995 in protest against a dictatorial label, Prince still produced another stormer. His final big hit, *The Most Beautiful Girl In The World*, seduced many into parting with the cash here, but *The Gold Experience* is more besides. *P-Control* distilled his rap credentials, *Billy Jack Bitch* is pointed at the party and *Gold* is a 24-carat curtain-closer.

Rarest **2LP first pressing £250+**
Translucent 2LP numbered promo £250



33 GETT OFF
(12" 1991)

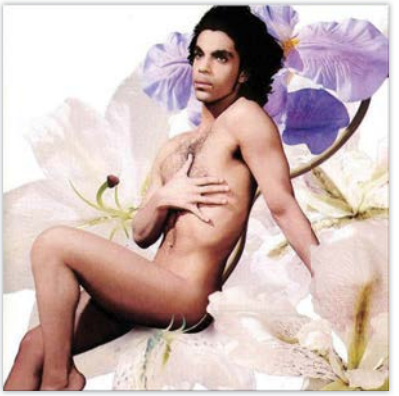
Housing two slamming remixes of Prince and the NPG's untameable first smash hit, this track was met with such positivity when he wrote it, Prince ditched rap-funk cut, *Horny Pony*, and stuck it on *Diamonds And Pearls* instead. Its tough groove jam-packed hip-hop, brass – some of James Brown's lyrics – and Eric Leeds' footloose flute into one mighty noise.

Rarest **Ltd Ed 'Birthday' 12" (Damn Near 10 Minutes Mix) £400**
Latest **12" Warners/Rhino, *12 Inches Of Prince* 2007 £15**

32 DIAMONDS AND PEARLS
(ALBUM 1991)

An entirely fresh set of tracks and an equally new band, Prince & The New Power Generation's *Diamonds And Pearls* brought back the funk. Most will know (and love) the thunderous *Gett Off*, dig the lustful snap of *Cream* and sing along to the lilting title track – a duet with NPG alumnus Rosie Gaines: but there's plenty more here, not least Tony M's plentiful raps, which reframed Prince's sound nicely.

Rarest **Sealed first pressing £100**



30 LOVESEXY
(ALBUM 1988)

With virtually all of the 500,000 copies of *The Black Album* destroyed, Prince returned to pop-funk. It was intended to be heard as a whole, and *Lovesexy*'s polychromatic funk-fest arrived as a single track of just over 45 minutes. Sheila E sat at the drum kit for half of it, but this was almost entirely Prince. From lust and carnal pleasure, through to God and racism, the opposing themes continued into this, the last in a run of pure genius.

Rarest **First pressing sealed with sticker £250**

28 THE BLACK ALBUM
(1987/1994)

Intended as a follow-up to *Sign 'O' The Times*, this is the 'lost' album that was never actually lost. Supposedly a reaction to criticism from black fans that he had sold out to pop, this is a man in the throes of flexing his funk muscle. Prince may have pulled the plug mere days before release, but most fans had bootlegs by the time of its eventual release as a limited-edition CD in 1994. The 'Funk Bible' is to be reissued on vinyl later this year.

Rarest **1987 withdrawn copy £10,000**
Latest **1994 Ltd Ed vinyl £200**

31 BATMAN
(ALBUM 1989)

Commissioned to soundtrack Tim Burton's original noir *Batman* remake, Prince entwined himself deep within the psyches of his comic-book quarries. Choice film samples coalesce with lyrics, loops and rigid grooves to remarkable effect. *The Future*, *Electric Chair*, *Trust* and *Lemon Crush* are Prince in full stride, while sky-seeking denouement, the stuttering funk-rock instrumental *Batdance*, strikes the killer blow.

Rarest **European test pressing £1,500**
Picture disc £40 to £50

29 8
(MADHOUSE ALBUM 1987)

Hours of improvised noodlings became *The Flesh* – an unreleased album made primarily with flautist/saxophonist Eric Leeds – and eventually evolved into Madhouse. Eight cosmic jazz-funk instrumentals serve as vindication of both Prince and Leeds' spectacular musicianship. A fictitious backstory spoke of founder member 'Austra Chanel', and the infamous '*Madhouse* cover girl' Maneca Lightner is pictured on the sleeve with a terrier dog.

Rarest **Mint US copy up to £200**

27 U GOT THE LOOK
(12" 1987)

Cut in Hollywood, *Sign 'O' The Times*' classic third single also introduced Prince protégée Sheena Easton, whose initial backing vocals were expanded into a duet (Easton and Prince would also duet on co-write *The Arms Of Orion* from the *Batman* soundtrack). Added treats on this 12" include the 'Long Look' extended version of *U Got The Look* and 'MoQuake' remix of *Housequake*.

Rarest **European/UK picture disc £70**
Latest **2017 Paisley Park reissue £10 to £15**

26 SIGN 'O' THE TIMES
(ALBUM 1987)

Spread across four flawless sides, Prince's prismatic centrepiece delivered a much-needed fix for *Purple Rain* lovers, after the indulgent, semi-psychedelia of *Around The World In A Day* and *Parade*'s filmic diversion. In an already erudite and fascinating world came yet more luscious vistas: the wondrous title track, *Housequake*, *Hot Thing*, *U Got The Look*… Prince's vision is distilled to perfection.

Rarest Sealed first pressings up to around **£200**
Latest Paisley Park 2016 reissue **£20**

24 MOUNTAINS
(12" EXTENDED VERSION 1986)

Clocking in at just shy of 10 minutes, the protracted version of Prince's celestial *Parade* single contains one of his most exorbitant, unmissable outro jams. Everyone gets a shift: Eric Leeds on sax and Atlanta Bliss on trumpet, while synth, flute and drums are supplied by Sheila E. Arriving after the measured pop of *Kiss*, and with cult instrumental *Alexa De Paris* on the B-side, this vindicated The Revolution's enviable synergy.

Rarest White Ltd Ed 10" UK version **£20**

22 KISS
(12" 1986)

Warners weren't keen, but *Parade*'s pacemaker was No. 1 worldwide. Initially handed over to Mazarati – who added the funk – then promptly reclaimed, this has since become a modern classic. Tom Jones bellowed it out over Art Of Noise's backing like a priapic Tarzan, but it became his best-known song. This 12" mix offers a fuller experience than the original, with bass, organ and horns – and comedic spoken-word ending.

Rarest Philippines Ltd Ed 12" **£60**
Shaped picture disc **£130**

25 GIRLS & BOYS
(12" 1986)

Otherworldly synth hooks, Marie France's spoken-word French, the first appearance of Eric Leeds' wandering sax and a killer chorus make this a highlight of the *Parade* (*Under The Cherry Moon*) soundtrack, and a Prince essential. Relatively easy to track down, this limited UK 12" is collectible, thanks in part to its companion 'personality poster'. Flipsides are *Under The Cherry Moon* and another appearance of the incredible *Erotic City*.

Rarest Shaped UK picture disc **£50**
Near-mint with poster **£200**

23 PARADE
(ALBUM 1986)

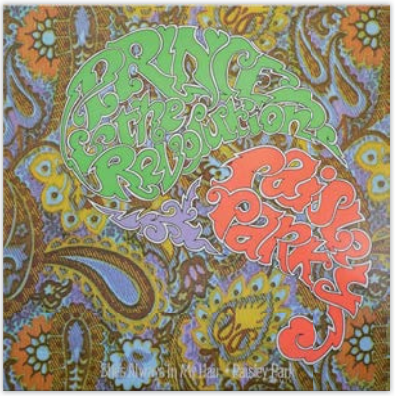
From the jubilant chorus of opener *Christopher Tracy's Parade* via a multitude of disorientating samples, and on to the intimate, plaintive beauty of curtain call *Sometimes It Snows In April*, this is mesmerising stuff. Potent sideways funk arrives with *I Wonder U*, while both *Kiss* and – highlight – *Mountains* revealed Prince was still a master of hooks. Up the aesthetic with the monochrome picture disc and pay more.

Rarest European promo gatefold **£350**
Latest 2016 Paisley Park reissue **£25**

21 POP LIFE UK
(12" 1985)

The US issue of *Pop Life* featuring Sheila E's 'Fresh Dance Mix' has it charms, but we favour the bolder approach of its nine-minute cousin featured on the UK 12". Some suggest that the booing crowd heard on the track was taken from Prince's ill-fated 1981 support slot with The Rolling Stones, but the less glamorous truth is that it was nabbed from a sample library. An extended version of *Girl* is on the B-side. Find a UK promo and pay double.

Latest 1985 **£30**



20 PAISLEY PARK
(12" 1985)

While *Raspberry Beret* was favoured in the US, it was this Beatles-esque slice of psychedelia that was elected to lead off *Around The World In A Day*'s UK campaign. It was also a fitting debut single for Prince's Paisley Park imprint. The 12" features two versions: the edited single, plus an extended take with Prince blasting out guitar heroics. Those partial to a picture disc should seek out the rarer 7", with shaped 'balloon boy' graphic.

Rarest **UK 12" with white lettering £70**

18 THE FAMILY
(THE FAMILY ALBUM 1985)

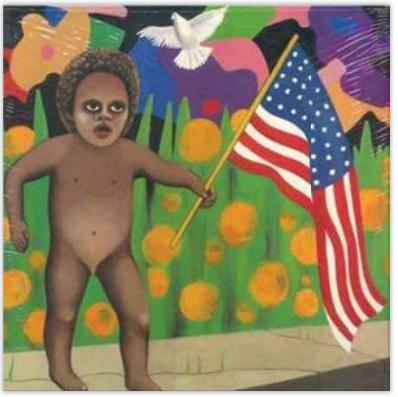
It's a curio within his catalogue for sure, partly as Prince wasn't technically in the band, but nonetheless, this one-off project was a novel conduit through which to experience his songs. The storming Minneapolis funk sound is all over opener *High Fashion,* and single *The Screams Of Passion* is a creeping sexualised duet. The oft-neglected version of *Nothing Compares To U* is unmissable. The inaugural release on Prince's Paisley Park Records.

Rarest **Mint first pressing £40**

16 RASPBERRY BERET
(12" 1985)

One more Prince mainstay that's truly rewarding in its extended form. Just shy of seven minutes, this lusciously romantic pop gem was first recorded in 1982 and finished off two years later. Ever subversive, Prince can be heard audibly clearing his throat in this version, included as it was "something no one else would do". It also has a dynamite backing chorus from the Revolution's Wendy Melvoin and Lisa Coleman, plus equally alluring artwork.

Rarest **UK promo £65**



19 AMERICA
(12" 21-MINUTE VERSION 1985)

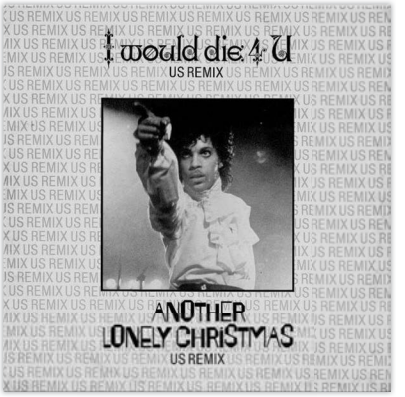
This uncompromising director's cut of his mid-80s single is Prince and band at their funkiest. Borne from a five-hour groove that fired until the tape ran out, Prince does little to hide his barbed, yet considered, critique on his country of residence. For *The New York Times,* it was "a patriotic protest song", for Revolution guitarist Wendy Melvoin, it was a "fucking freight train". Without a CD release, and unissued in the UK, this is gold dust.

Rarest **Philippines Ltd 12" (single edit) £100**

17 AROUND THE WORLD IN A DAY
(ALBUM 1985)

After his commercial zenith, *Purple Rain*, Prince wrong-footed the newcomers with an LP with a personal pilgrimage at its heart. From *Paisley Park*'s Beatles-esque leanings to the excitable rhythm jam of *Tamborine*, via failsafe funk (*America*) and flawless pop (*Raspberry Beret*), this was psychedelic and wide open. Doug Henders' artwork was stunning, too.

Rarest **Specialty Records pressing £200 to £500 Sealed first pressing £50**



15 I WOULD DIE 4 U
(12" 1984)

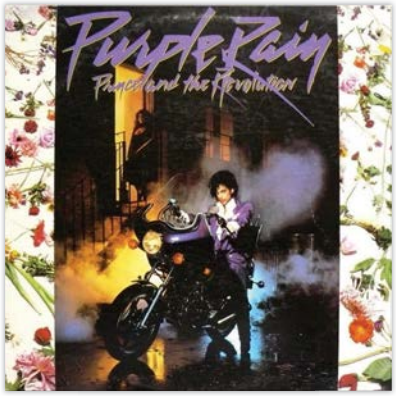
Of the manifold examples of this *Purple Rain* highlight, the unabbreviated 'US Remix' still remains our principal version. Written as far back as 1983, and first aired at a *Controversy* tour soundcheck, it was likely that flighty jam – or something similar – that found its way onto the grooves of this 12". An initial 30-minute marathon was recorded in October 1984, then dramatically edited for the 12". 10 minutes well spent.

Rarest **US 12" with custom oversized label £100**

14 WHEN DOVES CRY
(12" EXTENDED VERSION 1984)

Most settle for the mass-produced 7" of this No. 1 single, but being suckers for more, this full-length version is the one for us. *When Doves Cry* epitomises everything that is Prince: gated drum machine, cryptic lyrics, layered vocals and mighty guitar. Add his daredevil production tricks – he decided to mute the bass track at the last minute – and this is one of his golden moments. *17 Days…* is one of his finest B-sides, too.

Rarest 12", UK first pressing **£60 to £70**



13 PURPLE RAIN
(ALBUM 1984)

The record that felled jaws the world over. Held within its iconic sleeve was kaleidoscopic brilliance sprawled out across innumerable genres. Beguiling and smart, this majestic freakout is Prince's grand enterprise. The Revolution display their talents on opener *Let's Go Crazy*, *When Doves Cry* and *I Would Die 4 U* – as well as throughout the ever-unsolvable, Delphian title track.

Rarest Purple promo w/ poster **£700**
1984 test pressing **£1,790**
US Ltd Ed purple vinyl LP **£110**
Latest Warners, 2017 reissue **£20**

12 PURPLE RAIN
(UK 12" 1984)

Surely his crowning achievement, *Purple Rain* needs no introduction. It will forever remain the artist's anthem – and is in its delicious extended form here. What's more, turn the masterpiece over for the expansive *God*, the instrumental of all Prince instrumentals (and its vocal-included version). Whichever format you choose, this is a must.

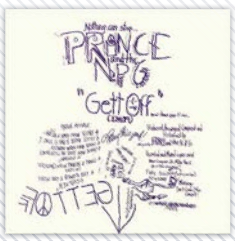
Rarest Purple promo **£100**
UK 12" white-label test pressing **£650**
Shaped picture disc **£200**
Latest Warners, 2017 reissue **£20**

Most Wanted

There's a crazy amount of incredibly rare Prince product, be it strange imports, coloured editions, picture discs, bootlegs and long-lost treasures – and prices have risen since his passing. *The Black Album* is the best-known: withdrawn by Prince prior to release, several promos were circulated and 500,000 copies were pressed, but the lion's share were destroyed. It's one of the world's rarest records. A recent discovery of five sealed copies rocked the vinyl collectors' world – three were sold for $15,000. A later limited run of the LP – cut on peach, white and (the rarest) grey-marbled vinyl also fetch considerable sums.

Another abandoned LP from 1986, entitled *Camille*, reached the test-pressing stage and one example recently changed hands for $29,645. Two LPs – long since out of print – are also valuable: 2001's *The Rainbow Children* goes for silly money, while *The Gold Experience*, if found in its 2LP limited gold-vinyl format, often sells for hundreds of pounds. Genuine collectors should also seek out the *Strange Tales From The Rain* 2LP Japanese promo on purple vinyl (£500).

The market for Prince 12"s is vibrant, too, with curios such as the single-sided *Gett Off* US 12" featuring the fabled 'Damn Near 10 Minutes' mix, purportedly limited to 1,500 copies for Prince's 33rd birthday. Prince picture discs are highly collectible, too, with the shaped ones in hot demand – the *Purple Rain* version goes for up to £200. Lastly, of the many scant promos around, 1981's super-rare *Dance Music Sex Romance* is another prized find.



11 LET'S GO CRAZY/ EROTIC CITY
(12" 1984)

With church organ in support, Prince's infamous *carpe diem* eulogy is one of the finest intros in existence. Released in the UK on equal billing with duet *Take Me With U*, *Purple Rain*'s second single was a clash of fizzing guitars and febrile synths. A necessity, not only for the main event in its full extended glory, but for the oft-unsung – and highly controversial – B-side, *Erotic City* (also extended) – a *LLV* favourite.

Rarest US 12" promo **£70**
Latest 2017 Warners reissue **£10**

10 1999 (7" 1982)

A defining moment in Prince's career, the release of *1999* turned the world purple. Its status as party song of the millennium aside, snap it up immediately for its stunning B-side – the stuttering piano-led ballad *How Come U Don't Call Me Anymore* finds Prince slipping seamlessly from falsetto to baritone, and deserved a higher billing. Appreciated by all fans (including Alicia Keys, who covered it), this was a live regular.

Rarest **French test pressing £100 Brazilian 7" £200**
Latest **1998 Warners 12" reissue £15**

9 1999 (ALBUM 1982)

With heavy MTV rotation for streamlined creations *1999* and *Little Red Corvette*, Prince reached omnipresence via this towering piece of work. His fifth LP captured a glossier, commercial guise. With audacious, blazing synths to the fore and with both pop hook and funk opus sharing equal billing, armageddon never sounded like so much fun.

Rarest **Seven-track initial UK run on single vinyl with different artwork and four tracks omitted £100 Sealed double LP, with sticker £100**
Latest **RSD 2018 Ltd seven-track £20 to £40**

8 LITTLE RED CORVETTE (LTD ED 12" 1982)

In the lengthier format, *Little Red Corvette* takes on a deep-seated beauty, and the B-sides (*Horny Toad/D.M.S.R*) aren't half bad either, but it's the rare spiral-bound calendar that will have Prince hoarders in palpitations. Only a few of these 'magazine styled' six-page calendars were made for the initial pressings, but find one intact and you're sitting on a goldmine. The rare 'negative' sleeve version with poster is also collectable.

Rarest **Mint with calendar £350**

The Vault

This fabled strongroom at Paisley Park supposedly houses a raft of unreleased Prince material and memorabilia, some of which has been issued in various forms, but much of which has never been heard by the public. After an investigation into the artist's death, Carver County Sheriff's Office has released a series of photos from behind the giant steel door that, while showing little of the exact content, reveal a bounty of major proportions: including a mysterious gold suitcase and endless reels of tapes, CDs and videos. Following his tragic exit, we're expecting the Prince Estate to release a trickle of posthumous material, which began recently with Prince's original version of *Nothing Compares 2 U* on picture disc. Comerica Bank, the curators of Prince's assets, have recently been in conflict with Prince's family, having attempted to move the contents of the Vault to a climate-controlled storage facility in LA.

4Ever

While the greatest hits is often maligned, many fans preferring to appreciate the music in context, this all-encompassing 2016 4LP set is an excellent buy for those wanting a decent overview. Beautifully packaged, this 40-track box contains over a decade of hits from Prince's golden tenure at Warner Bros. While most here are edited versions, the hardcore will be suitably enticed by the inclusion of the previously unreleased *Moonbeam Levels* from 1982. Heavyweight vinyl, too.

7 CONTROVERSY (ALBUM 1981)

With compass spinning wildly before commencing this fourth album, Prince got the job done mining past stylistic glories and with a new social awareness added to his erotic manifesto. Squelchy synths, grooved-up pop vibes aplenty – a soupçon of disco – and the usual indefinable voodoo, meant the title track; *Sexuality*; *Do Me, Baby*; *Let's Work* and the zippy curtain-call *Jack U Off* united with their supporting cast for vindication that Prince was growing up.

Rarest **White-label UK promo £600**
Latest **Warners 2014 reissue £20**

6 GOTTA STOP (MESSIN' ABOUT)
(SINGLE 1981)

Released just after its carnal mothership, *Dirty Mind*, this rarity was a standalone UK-only single, hence its uncontrollable draw. There were two 7s and two accompanying 12s as well – all great – but it's the initial 45 we're interested in here, with album cut *Uptown* on the B-side. Potent synth hooks, rawk guitar and lustful lyrics meant that when released to coincide with Prince's debut UK gigs, they were all rammed.

Rarest First pressing 7" **£40** UK 12" **£150**
Latest *4Ever* (2016) **£40 to £50**

4 SEXY DANCER
(12" 1980)

For some reason, only island-dwelling fans in the UK and Japan were targeted with Prince's sixth single. Nonetheless, it received regular attention from hip US club DJs, whose enthusiastic airings helped it to No. 3 in the Billboard Disco chart – all without an official US release. This full-length take reveals Prince's early mastery of the mid-tempo funk groove. From the corporeal glissando yowl of the intro to the eventual close, this is sheer class.

Rarest N/A
Latest 1980 **£50**

2 I WANNA BE YOUR LOVER
(LTD ED 12" 1979)

His first major hit in the US and his debut UK instalment, these were the grooves that introduced that infamous searing falsetto. Only 21, and with mega-stardom still some way off, this disco-baiting side revealed immediately we all had a lot of catching up to do. The 7" is a worthy addition to any collection, but it's the full-length UK version on the limited 12" that fits here.

Rarest Mexican 7" promo (1980) **£450**
One-sided 12" picture-disc promo **£120**
Latest Rhino, 12 Inches Of Prince (2007) **£125**

5 DIRTY MIND
(ALBUM 1980)

With his stripped-back third transmission, the libertine planted his sovereign flag. His contract granted ultimate freedom and, engineering as 'Jamie Starr' in his private studio oasis, he set the controls for the sexual stratosphere. Replacing the slushy love vistas of its predecessor was an erotic underworld where XXX-funk clashed with pulsing synth and filthy pop while R&B and New Wave had an illicit, up-against-the-wall dalliance with the listening world.

Rarest Warners test pressing, 1980 **£350**
Latest Warners/Rhino, 2011 **£15**

3 PRINCE
(ALBUM 1979)

Prince's sophomore LP announced his entry into the pop arena. A concoction of sexually charged funk and silky balladry, hard rock, disco and soul, it spawned a clutch of singles – from first major hit *I Wanna Be Your Lover*, to the animalistic tear of *Bambi*, reserved for Belgium and the Netherlands only. *I Feel For You* was a Top 10 hit for Chaka Khan in 1984.

Rarest Test pressings and import promos **£100+**
Latest Warners, 2016 reissue **£15 to £20**

1 FOR YOU
(ALBUM 1978)

Prince opened his account while still a teenager. Not only that, he did pretty much everything, from songwriting to production, a fact that didn't go unnoticed. With his entire three-album budget squandered and rendering himself a 'physical wreck', *For You* tanked, but cuts such as *Just As Long As We're Together* and funk closer *I'm Yours* hinted at the formidable possibilities. ●

Rarest (US mint, sealed first pressing) **£250+**
Latest 2016 Warners reissue **£20**

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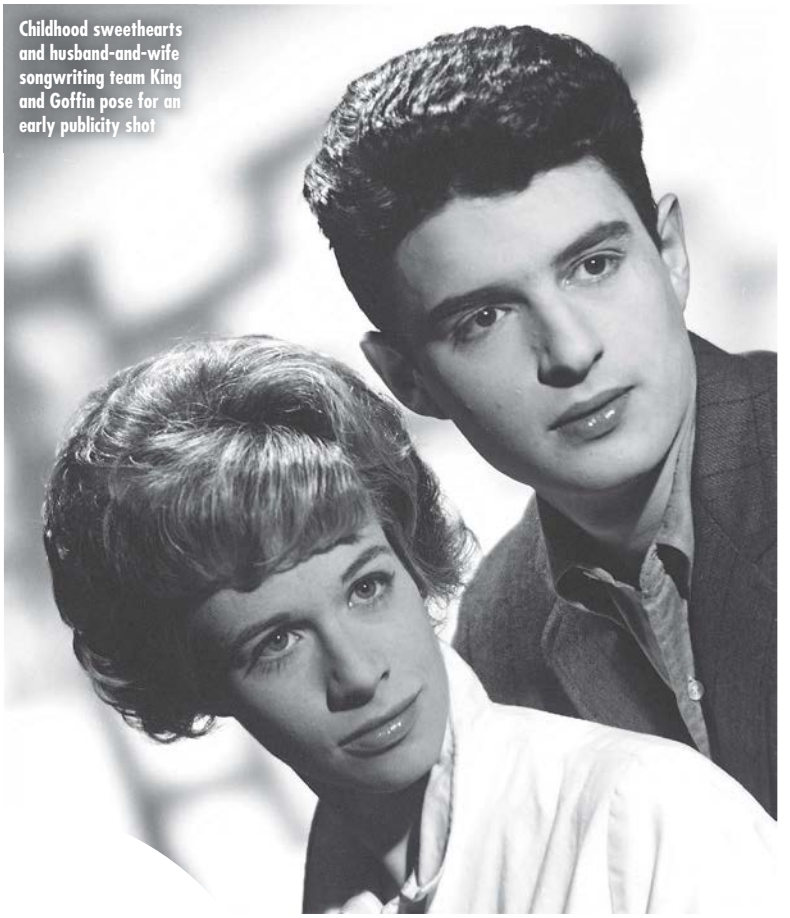
Classic Album
CAROLE KING
TAPESTRY

From late-60s Laurel Canyon came a singer-songwriter who had honed her craft the hard way, creating hit after hit in the cramped confines of a Broadway publisher's office. As a new decade dawned, Carole King emerged with an album of her own – and it was one that would resonate with a whole generation, as **Neil Crossley** explains…

Carole King Tapestry


Childhood sweethearts and husband-and-wife songwriting team King and Goffin pose for an early publicity shot

Getty

In early 1969, copies of a demo recording by Brooklyn-raised songwriter Carole King began circulating among LA record producers and A&R executives. The recordings had been submitted by Lou Adler, producer, talent manager and head of the West Coast office of King's publishing company, Aldon Music. Adler was convinced there was a future for King as a performer, as well as a songwriter, and his suspicions were reinforced when he started to make follow-up calls. "I couldn't get the demos back," he told *Variety* in 2012. "They were collecting them as part of their record collection. There's something about the piano feel and the fact she was doing a lot of the parts and the vocals and the background vocals that just captivated all of these people."

Two years later, on 10 February 1971, many of the songs from the demo appeared on King's second album, *Tapestry*. Adler's instincts had been proved correct. King's prodigious talent as a songwriter, combined with her raw, uncontrived vocal delivery, resulted in an album of rare quality and depth. The album sold 25 million copies, spent 15 weeks at No. 1 in the Billboard charts, remained in the charts for 313 weeks and was voted No. 36 in *Rolling Stone*'s 500 Greatest Albums Of All Time. Almost five decades on, it remains a work of abiding artistic merit.

Few people listening to *Tapestry* would've made the connection between the barefoot, baggy-jumpered woman on the front cover of the album and the jobbing New York songwriter of a decade earlier.

But by the time Adler first peddled her songs around LA's music-industry elite, King had already written numerous hits for other artists. *Rolling Stone* magazine once calculated that King's chart entries from her days as a staff songwriter would run to five hours if they were played back to back. Her career from songwriting alone is so expansive that it dwarfs even the monster sales figures achieved by *Tapestry*.

Carole King's chart entries from her days as a staff songwriter would run to five hours if they were played back to back

King during sessions for *Tapestry* at A&M Studios in LA in January 1971

Getty

HITSVILLE HIGHS

King started early. Born Carol Joan Klein in 1942 in Manhattan, she had perfect pitch at the age of four and an insatiable appetite for music. Her mother Eugenia taught her music theory and elementary piano technique. "My mother never forced me to practise," she recalled in her 2012 autobiography *A Natural Woman*. "She didn't have to. I wanted so much to master the popular songs that poured out of the radio."

At high school in Brooklyn, she changed her name to Carole King, formed a band called the Co-Sines and made demo records with her friend Paul Simon for $25 a session. She attended Queens College in Brooklyn, and it was here that she met Gerry Goffin, who would become her songwriting partner.

At the age of 17, King became pregnant by Goffin and the pair married in August 1959 at a Jewish ceremony on Long Island. They quit college, took day jobs and began writing songs together in the evenings. That same year, they wrote their first hit *Will You Love Me Tomorrow*, which yielded a US No. 1 single for The Shirelles in 1960. It was a landmark moment, allowing the couple to give up their day jobs to focus on writing.

By now, music publisher Don Kirshner had signed them to his Aldon Music empire, based at 1650 Broadway. Goffin wrote the lyrics, King wrote the music, and they worked regular office hours in one of the company's tiny songwriting cubicles.

Getty

Natural Woman

Within seconds of Jerry Wexler asking Goffin and King to write a song called 'Natural Woman' for Aretha Franklin, the couple began formulating ideas as they drove home, out of Manhattan. King wrote in her autobiography: "We kissed [the girls] goodnight and headed up to the red room. I sat down at the piano, put my hands on the keys and played a few chords. It was unbelievable how right they were, and we both knew it. Four decades later, Gerry remembered it this way in a phone call as we reminisced about writing this song: 'You sat down at the piano and out came some gospel chords in 6/8 tempo. Those chords were exactly where I thought the song should go. You made it really easy for me to come out with the lyrics. You made it effortless'. If Gerry thought my chords were exactly right, I was blown away by his lyrical imagery. 'A soul in the lost and found… you came along to claim it…' How did he come up with these things?"

The duo went on to write an astonishing catalogue of hits for a broad range of artists, including *Take Good Care Of My Baby* (Bobby Vee, 1961); *The Loco-Motion* (Little Eva, 1962); *Up On The Roof* (The Drifters, 1962); *Chains* (The Cookies, 1962; The Beatles, 1963); *One Fine Day* (The Chiffons, 1963); *Hey Girl* (Freddie Scott, 1963); *I'm Into Something Good* (Herman's Hermits, 1964); and *Don't Bring Me Down* (The Animals, 1966).

NATURAL WOMAN

By 1966, King, Goffin and their two daughters were living in the distinctly suburban neighbourhood of West Orange, New Jersey. "I was surrounded by the wives of doctors, accountants, lawyers," recalled King of this period, "with a pen in one hand and a baby in the other. I was a real oddity: a working woman."

The experience provided rich material for their next composition, *Pleasant Valley Sunday*, whose lyrics were

An outtake from the album-cover photoshoot shows King in relaxed mood, clutching her self-made tapestry prop

The songs

Band credits

Carole King Vocals, piano, keyboards, backing vocals
James Taylor Acoustic guitar, backing vocals
Danny 'Kootch' Kortchmar Acoustic guitar, conga, electric guitar, vocals
Charles Larkey Bass guitar, string bass, string quartet
Russ Kunkel Drums
Joel O'Brien Drums

Additional personnel

Curtis Amy Flute; baritone, soprano and tenor saxophone; string quartet
Tim Powers Drums
David Campbell Cello, viola
Merry Clayton Backing vocals
Terry King Cello, tenor saxophone, string quartet
Joni Mitchell Backing vocals
Ralph Schuckett Electric piano
Barry Socher Violin, tenor saxophone, viola, string quartet
Perry Steinberg Bass guitar, violin, tenor saxophone, string bass
Julia Tillman Background vocals

Production

A&M Recording Studios, Studio B, Hollywood, California
Producer Lou Adler
Engineer Hank Cicalo
Mastering Vic Anesini
Recorded January 1971
Released 10 February 1971

1 *I FEEL THE EARTH MOVE*

A strident piano-led groove intros the album on what one critic described as "probably the most sexually aggressive song" on an otherwise mellow and confessional record. It was producer Lou Adler's decision to place King's piano high up in the mix on this track, to differentiate it from the guitar-driven sound of her debut album, *Writer*. The phrasing of King's vocal – which ranges from smooth and mellow to blues raunch – weaves effortlessly within the syncopated piano stabs. Russ Kunkel lays down a straightforward rhythm and Danny 'Kootch' Kortchmar adds tasteful guitar, but it's Charles Larkey's bass, prominent in the mix, that really helps define the character of the song, with his inspired Stax-like runs and flourishes.

The upbeat nature of *I Feel The Earth Move* prompted King's label Ode Records to select it as the A-side for the album's first single, although DJs and listeners soon began to favour the slower B-side *It's Too Late*. Both tracks were among the biggest mainstream pop hits of 1971. In the UK, the single reached No. 6, while in the US it spent five consecutive weeks in the No. 1 position.

2 *SO FAR AWAY*

While it was Gerry Goffin who provided lyrics for Goffin & King's hits, *Tapestry* demonstrated that King had become as gifted with lyrics as she was with the music. "Her lyrics just blew me away," recalled Brill Building songwriter Barry Mann, who bought *Tapestry* after reading Jon Landau's review in *Rolling Stone*.
A wistful jazz-pop chord progression provides the template for this song, whose deceptively simple lyric conveys the physical and emotional distance between the narrator and their lover. As is the case throughout the album, the simplicity of the arrangements provides ample space for the songs to breathe. James Taylor contributes sparse acoustic-guitar arpeggios, while bassist Charles Larkey – who was also King's second husband – and flautist Curtis Amy add harmonic counterpoint. Drummer Russ Kunkel gives a veritable masterclass in the power of

Getty

L to R: Danny 'Kootch' Kortchmar, Carole King, Russ Kunkle, Charles Larkey and Ralph Schuckett during the *Tapestry* recording sessions

a social commentary on consumerism. The track became the biggest hit for The Monkees, reaching No. 3 in the US singles charts in November 1967.

That same year, an event occurred that would result in one of Goffin and King's most enduring songwriting achievements. As the pair were walking down Broadway one afternoon, a limousine with darkened windows pulled up. The rear window rolled down to reveal producer Jerry Wexler, a partner at Atlantic Records. "I'm looking for a really big hit for Aretha," he said. "How about writing a song called 'Natural Woman'?"

The prospect of writing for Atlantic's newly signed R&B artist Aretha Franklin was an intoxicating one. "I think I already got an idea," said Goffin in his thick Brooklyn accent, as Wexler's face receded into the darkness and his limo eased back into the flow of traffic moving down Broadway. That evening, after kissing their two daughters goodnight, the couple sat down and wrote the music and lyrics [see 'Natural Woman' boxout on p65].

The following morning, they delivered it to a jubilant Wexler. The record was a colossal hit for Franklin and became a standard in her set. Four years later, King's rendition of the song would be a defining moment on the *Tapestry* album.

> ***"I'm looking for a really big hit for Aretha. How about writing a song called 'Natural Woman'?"***
>
> JERRY WEXLER

WAY OUT WEST

By 1968, Goffin and King's songwriting was going from strength to strength, but their personal relationship was in crisis and the couple divorced, due in part to Goffin's numerous infidelities. With her two daughters, Louise and Sherry, King moved to the West Coast, settling in the idyllic songwriting community of Laurel Canyon, home to the likes of Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, David Crosby, Stephen Stills and Mama Cass Elliott.

Laurel Canyon was a bohemian stronghold, a hotbed of the new 'counterculture' folk and rock scenes. But unlike many of her fellow singer-songwriters, King did not participate in the hedonism of the time.

Being a mother and a breadwinner in her late teens had fostered a strong sense of responsibility in King, as she balanced a career and family.

"I worked very hard to hold onto my life as well as a career, and I've been blessed to have both," she said.

GOING SOLO

King signed to Lou Adler's Ode label, and briefly formed a band called The City with guitarist Danny 'Kootch' Kortchmar and bassist Charles Larkey. They put out one album, *Now That Everything's Been Said*, but sales were slow because of King's unwillingness to perform due to stage fright. Despite this impediment, she decided to focus solely on singing her own songs. In 1970, she released her first solo album, *Writer*, which peaked at No. 84 on the Billboard album charts.

In 1970, King was invited to play piano with James Taylor, who would have his first No. 1 hit the following year with a cover of King's *You've Got A Friend*. Along with Lou Adler, Taylor urged King to take ownership of her music by emerging from the background into the spotlight. On a tour in support of Taylor's breakthrough album *Sweet Baby James* in 1970, Taylor coaxed King to sing one of her own songs in public for the first time, at Queens College, her *alma mater* in Brooklyn.

"I have James Taylor to thank for sort of nudging me out in front and teaching me by example that all you have to do is go out there and be yourself, sing the songs and everything will be fine," she recalled in an interview in 2017.

IN THE STUDIO

In early January 1971, Carole King arrived at A&M Studios in Hollywood – a series of grey colonial clapboard cottages, formerly the Charlie Chaplin Studios, on the corner of Sunset Boulevard and La Brea Avenue – to begin recording her second album, which would become *Tapestry*.

The album featured new compositions as well as reinterpretations of three tracks written years earlier by Goffin and King: *Will You Love Me Tomorrow*, originally recorded by The Shirelles and *(You Make Me Feel Like A) Natural Woman*, the hit for Aretha Franklin.

Two of the new compositions – *It's Too Late* and *Where You Lead* – had been co-written with lyricist and friend Toni Stern. But the rest, including *You've Got A Friend*, were written solely by King.

Tapestry was recorded in Studio B concurrently with James Taylor's second album *Mud Slide Slim And The Blue Horizon*, with an overlapping group of musicians such as guitarist Danny 'Kootch' Kortchmar, bassist Charles Larkey and drummers Russ Kunkel and Joel O'Brien. Taylor played guitar on much of *Tapestry*, and sang backing vocals along with Joni Mitchell, who was recording her landmark album *Blue* in the adjacent Studio C.

"They were all friends and Joni and James were friends," recalled engineer Hank Cicalo. "It was fun. We were making a good record and that's all we knew then."

Engineer Hank Cicalo (left) and record producer Lou Adler listen back to a take with King

Getty

A Place For The Pause

"With vinyl having two sides, there used to be a logical place for a pause," recalled Carole King in the BBC documentary *You've Got A Friend: The Carole King Story*. "And we – as the creators of that product – had to build in a place for that pause. And I think that made for really interesting theatre, almost. It would be like the intermission in a play. And then the actual sequencing of an album is kind of a lost art."

It's a point reinforced by Lou Adler, producer of *Tapestry*. "Sequencing at that time was very, very important, because it was – you go through one side, you turn it over, and so all of that was based upon one person listening to it, you know? And not: 'How's this going to go over with 25 million people?'."

The songs *continued*

understated playing and King's voice is pure and natural throughout, with the occasional slight blues rasp at moments that only heightens its impact. A heartfelt song packed with emotional resonance.

3 *IT'S TOO LATE*

"If there's a truer song about breaking up, then the world (or AM radio) isn't ready for it," concluded music critic Robert Christgau of *It's Too Late*. Opening with an Am7-D6 progression, the melancholic tone of the song is emphasised by its minor key. In some ways, this feels like a song crafted by professional songwriters, rather than a song written straight from the heart. There is a slick, jazz-light, Tin Pan Alley feel to it – pop sensibilities to the fore – although there's little doubt it was heartfelt and inspired by real events. King's co-writer on the track, Toni Stern, told author Sheila Weller that she wrote the lyrics in a single day, when her relationship with James Taylor ended. One music critic perceived implicit feminism in the lyrics, because the woman leaves the man, a novel lyrical concept in relatively unenlightened times. King's natural, unaffected vocal style gives the song conviction, while Curtis Amy's soprano sax and Danny 'Kootch' Kortchmar's guitar fuel the sentiment. "We were doing two to three tunes a day," recalled Kortchmar. "I played the solos 'off the floor'; in other words, the solos weren't even overdubbed, they were just played live. I didn't have time to think about it and it's a good thing, because if I'd thought about it, I would have screwed them up. Carole just said: 'You play a solo here', and I did."

4 *HOME AGAIN*

A beautiful yearning pervades this track, one of the purest on the album. Opening with an A to G intro, the first verse features just vocals, piano, acoustic guitar and a descending bassline, which ease the listener in before the drums enter at the start of the second verse. The simplicity of vocals and production extends to King's playing throughout *Tapestry*, which is a significant factor in its success. "What she has is an ability to make it sound so simple, but there's a lot of different patterns going on," said producer Lou Adler in *You've Got A Friend: The Carole King Story*. "When we did *Tapestry*, when you really sit down and listen to the piano part, you'll hear string and horn figures in there. And that comes from her days of making demos where she was laying out charts for whoever was going to record the song. So it sounds simple, but it's intricate."

5 *BEAUTIFUL*

Carole King said that she did not consciously attempt to write *Beautiful*; rather, it arrived spontaneously. The inspiration for the song came while she was riding the subway in New York, and is based on her realisation that the way she perceived others actually reflected how she herself felt. King also noted that the spontaneous nature of the song was the reason for the complete absence of rhyme in the refrain, although this factor is undoubtedly an asset. The track focuses on self-esteem and having a positive outlook: a breezy, upbeat premise which could explain why it was seized upon as the title for the award-winning musical of the same name about King's life. In his 2006 book, *The Words And Music Of Carole King*, author James Perone refers to *Beautiful* as a "great

The songs *continued*

sleeper track" but criticises it for the use of a synthesiser on it, which he argues detracts from the song's call for authenticity. The song sounds cloying at times – with its upbeat 'show must go on' sentiment – but the integrity of King's vocal performance once again redeems any such creative shortcomings.

6 *WAY OVER YONDER*

Part of the strength of *Tapestry* is how timeless many of the songs sound; a fact borne out by this composition, which has a pronounced gospel feel to it. A regular staple in Carole King's live set to this day, the song – in 6/8 time – could arguably have numerous different meanings. Due to its gospel style, it has often been interpreted as a quest for spiritual resolution, although it seems far more likely that the lyrical intent is broader, a yearning for a physical place or feeling, where she once found solace. On *Tapestry*, the basic tracks were recorded live in the studio, and much of their power stems from the chemistry between King, Taylor, Larkey, Kortchmar and drummers Kunkel and O'Brien. Their feel and groove on tracks such as *Way Over Yonder* elevates the music to a higher emotional plane.

7 *YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND*

King once singled out *You've Got A Friend* as one of the most incredible songwriting experiences of her life, because it poured from her in an almost complete form. "The song was as close to pure inspiration as I've ever experienced," she said. "The song wrote itself. It was written by something outside myself, through me." In a selfless gesture, she first gave the song to James Taylor for his *Mud Slide Slim And The Blue Horizon* album, after Taylor and his manager Peter Asher heard her play it during a soundcheck, when she was touring as part of Taylor's band. "In an amazing act of generosity, she let me cut this tune first and release it first," said Taylor during a reunion concert with King, at the legendary Troubadour Club in Hollywood in 2007. "I was amazed, because she was starting *Tapestry* at the time. I didn't realise that I'd be playing it every single night for the rest of my life."

King's and Taylor's versions were recorded near simultaneously, using the same musicians. Taylor's version went to No. 1 in the US singles chart and No. 4 in the UK. The lyrics offer a sense of humanity and reassurance for those in need of friendship, and these universal themes fuelled its emotional resonance with listeners across the globe. Despite the success of Taylor's version, there is a particular intimacy and sincerity to King's rendition that Taylor's version lacks, and the track is central to the impact of the *Tapestry* album.

8 *WHERE YOU LEAD*

This is one of two Carole King/Toni Stern collaborations featured on *Tapestry*, the other being the No. 1 single *It's Too Late*. King had already written the music and most of the lyric for *Where You Lead* when she was introduced to songwriter Stern, and the two began collaborating. King asked for help with the bridge of the song, and offered a potential co-writing credit. Stern disliked what she perceived as the servile nature of the lyrics and provided lyrics for the bridge that she felt expressed a more powerful narrative voice: "If you want to live in fucking New York City/ Honey you know I will." King deleted the word 'fucking', and sought producer Lou Adler's opinion on the reference to New York City. Adler liked the reference, and the lyrics for the song were complete.

It's an upbeat track, featuring solid backing from the rhythm section of Charles Larkey and Russ Kunkel. Backing vocals are by Merry Clayton who, two years earlier, had provided

Hail To The King

In December 2015, in a rousing and deeply emotional moment, Aretha Franklin gave an acclaimed performance of *(You Make Me Feel Like A) Natural Woman* at the Kennedy Center Honors in Washington DC, to celebrate the achievements of Carole King and other luminaries such as director George Lucas. When Franklin sat down at a grand piano and launched into the song's powerful opening chords, King was stunned, overawed and ecstatic in equal measure at the gesture. King's surprise turned to excitement as she urged Franklin on from her standing position in the upper balcony. As Franklin's soulful and emotive gospel voice broke into the second line, President Barack Obama – sitting immediately to King's left – could be seen wiping a tear from his left cheek.

THE RIGHT MOOD

All lighting was dimmed to create a warm, calming ambience in the studio. "And after a while, they got so comfortable with that, that it was like they were playing in their living room," says Cicalo.

Records such as *Tapestry* could be overproduced in an instant by the desire to add more instrumentation. But from the outset, King and her producer Lou Adler knew instinctively that simplicity was key. "I wanted it to stay simple and to always have that feeling that Carole was singing to you and playing the piano," said Adler, in the BBC documentary *You've Got A Friend: The Carole King Story*."

All discussion about the creative direction of the album took place between Adler and King before recording began. When King entered the studio each day, she knew exactly what she wanted to achieve.

"When it comes to her music, she is in control of how it's going to come out," said drummer Russ Kunkel. "It's wonderful to work with a person that has that kind of confidence in what they want. It makes it really easy for someone like me to find out what they need and want and give it to them."

RIGHT SONGS, RIGHT TIME

Tapestry took just a handful of weeks to record, at a cost of $15,000. The album Carole King once referred to as "a collection of songs I was doing demos of" was released two weeks later on 10 February 1971. Its impact was immediate. "*Tapestry* was one of those albums that it came out and it was everywhere immediately," said writer Anthony DeCurtis of *Rolling Stone* magazine. "*Sgt. Pepper…* was the only other experience I've ever had like that where the record appears, and then suddenly, you know every song and everywhere you go, people are playing it."

In an era when the hopes and idealism of the 60s were turning sour, the directness and honesty of *Tapestry*, with its themes of friendship and retrospection, rang true for many, thrusting it firmly into the mainstream. *Tapestry* was almost tailor-made for the burgeoning AOR and FM radio soft-rock market, yet it was imbued throughout with depth, integrity and truth. "It was the right songs at the right time for the audience that was ready for them," recalled Brill Building songwriter Cynthia Weil. "They said everything that people were feeling and couldn't really express."

SIMPLE SOUND

Almost five decades on, it is not just the quality of the songs or the simplicity and directness of the arrangements that makes *Tapestry* so groundbreaking, it is the quality of Carole

Getty

King's voice. Seldom had a female singer recorded with such honesty and lack of affectation. In her biography, *A Natural Woman*, King admits she "wasn't in the same league vocally as Aretha Franklin, Joni Mitchell or Barbra Streisand", who she considered 'real singers'. "But I knew how to convey the mood and emotion of a song with an honest, straight-from-the-heart interpretation."

The 'purity' of the record's sound was a theme highlighted in the numerous glowing reviews that greeted its release. "The simplicity of the singing, composition, and ultimate feeling achieved the kind of eloquence and beauty that I had forgotten rock is capable of," wrote critic Jon Landau in *Rolling Stone* magazine. "Conviction and commitment are the life blood of *Tapestry,* and are precisely what make it so fine." ●

King with *Tapestry*'s haul of Grammys for Record Of The Year (*It's Too Late*), Album Of The Year, Best Female Pop Vocal Performance and Song Of The Year (*You've Got A Friend*)

the soaring vocal on The Rolling Stones' track *Gimme Shelter*. In 2000, King recorded a lyrically revised version of the song with her daughter Louise, as a theme tune for the TV series *Gilmore Girls*.

9 *WILL YOU LOVE ME TOMORROW*

11 years after The Shirelles landed a No. 1 hit with this Goffin & King composition, King herself re-recorded it for *Tapestry*. It's a testament to the quality of the writing that the melody and lyrics ring just as true in this early-70s singer-songwriter style as they did in the previous doo-wop soul-pop context. King's solo treatment is much slower, contemplative and melancholic. Once again, the simplicity of her arrangements and Lou Adler's production is key. After a mellow four-bar piano intro, King's rich and intimate vocal begins, followed by a hi-hat, root bass notes from Larkey and gentle shimmering acoustic guitar from James Taylor. As ever, King's voice breaks up slightly as she strains for the higher notes, which only heightens the emotional impact of the song.

10 *SMACKWATER JACK*

This rollicking up-tempo shuffle, set in the Old West, is a curious addition on an otherwise deeply personal and introspective album. The song recounts the story of a confrontation between outlaw Smackwater Jack and Native American Big Jim, a Shawnee chief. It's a fierce, infectious groove and the band are clearly in their element. Ralph Schuckett's electric piano and Danny Kortchmar's guitar predominate, while bassist Charles Larkey and drummer Russ Kunkel excel as always. The track became a live favourite for fans, with King strapping on a guitar and rocking out up-front.

11 *TAPESTRY*

If there's one song on the album that has not stood the test of time, then it is the title track, with its overt allegorical theme. In the 'back to the garden' post-Woodstock era, the references no doubt rang true – but almost five decades on, it seems rather twee. Despite such shortcomings, the track boasts an impressive vocal performance from King, whose piano flourishes provide the sole instrumentation on this track.

12 *(YOU MAKE ME FEEL LIKE) A NATURAL WOMAN*

When King chose to revisit some of the Goffin & King back catalogue for inclusion on *Tapestry*, it was little surprise that *(You Make Me Feel Like A) Natural Woman* would be on there. The pair had written the song for Aretha Franklin within 24 hours of Atlantic Records' Jerry Wexler's commissioning them in 1967. They knew they had written a hit that day, and King recalled being rendered speechless with emotion when she first heard Franklin's recording.

"To this day I can't convey how I felt in words," she recalled. "Anyone who had written a song in 1967, hoping it would be performed by a singer who could take it to the highest level of excellence, emotional connection, and public exposure, would surely have wanted that singer to be Aretha Franklin."

COVER STAR

VAUGHAN OLIVER

As the visual mastermind of the 4AD label, Vaughan Oliver designed some of the most artful sleeves of the 80s and 90s. **Murray Stassen** finds out how the label's organic aesthetic evolved…

Most of the artists and photographers we've featured in these pages are freelancers who have worked for a variety of clients over the years. Vaughan Oliver is an exception, a man whose work – over more than three decades – has been largely commissioned by and become synonymous with one label alone: 4AD.

Working alongside colleagues such as photographer Nigel Grierson and Chris Bigg as 23 Envelope and later v23, Oliver pioneered an instantly recognisable style of sleeve design – at times otherworldly and mysterious, often striking, and usually featuring immaculately styled typography. He's a unique sleeve designer with a body of work that can genuinely be described as beautiful, and his style was crucial in positioning the label at the artier end of the UK independent scene.

Unlike other designers who became sidetracked into a career in the music industry, Oliver had decided as a teenager that he wanted to design record sleeves. "It was in my thoughts before I started out, really," he reveals, sat in his archive at The University For The Creative Arts in Epsom, where he teaches as a visiting professor.

"There was nothing more exciting than waiting in anticipation for the next Roxy Music album sleeve – the early ones – it was just a wonderful thing. If it's accompanied by music… well, that connection between visuals and music produces something that is bigger than the individual parts, if it works. It also seemed back then that people like Roger Dean or Hipgnosis were using their imagination, stretching things, not doing things in the normal way. So in my naïve teenage way, I thought, 'I want to do that'."

A son of Sedgefield in County Durham, Oliver studied graphic design at Newcastle Polytechnic before he found a job down south working in a packaging company, designing drinks labels. "It did have an effect on me," he reveals, surprisingly. "It turned me on to typography, which I never took seriously at college. If you look at a drinks label, you had all these different typefaces – you've got fat ones, skinny ones, you've got script… I could see how you could subvert what was going on in the mainstream on those labels."

But music was the area he really wanted to work in and in post-punk London, Oliver would be a regular face at gigs in town. He'd quite often glimpse Ivo Watts-Russell, owner of the nascent 4AD label. Ivo had released the first Birthday Party and Bauhaus albums and was starting to make a name for himself as one of the independent scene's leading lights. "I'd chance my arm every time I saw him. I'd say: 'Give us a job, mate. You need a logo, you need some consistency in your design'."

> "EVERY TIME I SAW IVO, I'D SAY: 'GIVE US A JOB. YOU NEED A LOGO, YOU NEED SOME CONSISTENCY IN YOUR DESIGN'"

CORPORATE SUBVERSION

"He didn't take much persuading, because he had the same passion and care for the artwork as he did for the music; I used to love hearing him recall his first album – he could remember the colour of the inner sleeve, everything about it." Watts-Russell handed him the gig of designing the sleeve for Modern English's *Gathering Dust* single. The band had wanted to use a particular Diane Arbus photograph and, coincidentally, Oliver already had a screen print based on the same image in his portfolio. Soon he was taken on as 4AD's first full-time employee.

There were other indies that placed a premium on design around this time – Factory, most notably – but Ivo and 4AD seemed to grasp that using a single design style could set the tone for the whole label and would, in effect (to use a modern term), 'brand' it. "We were trying to be the antithesis of corporate identity, but we were still taking aspects of the corporate world and subverting it. The idea of a label with an identity had its precedents in Blue Note and ECM. But there was more of a definite template to what ECM were doing – neat Sans Serif type in top corner, mysterious sort of image. At 4AD, we didn't sit down and say, 'we need an identity', but one developed organically, evolving over

Vaughan Oliver's distinctive style provided visual continuity for 4AD's varied roster of artists

"THERE WAS NO MARKETING DEPARTMENT AT 4AD: I WAS THE MARKETING DEPARTMENT. ALL THE CREATIVE AIRWAVES WERE OPEN"

time. It was only after maybe six years, I'd put an exhibition up and you can see a thread."

But Oliver didn't apply a one-size-fits-all approach. "Even though I was in-house, the bands were free to do their own sleeves. Some gave me material to use; others said: 'What do you think?'. Others said: 'We've got our own ideas, we're going to do them ourselves'. I was trying to give each band their own identity… but there was some kind of common thread."

Oliver was in the blessed position of being able to hear music weeks, sometimes months before he had to deliver artwork. "I'd hear the demos, I'd hear how things were gestating. Then you'd have the dialogue with the band. My peers at other labels would go: 'You fucking lucky bastard! We get a call on a Friday and they want the sleeve on the Monday, a campaign by the Tuesday!'."

With the label's then-flagship band Cocteau Twins, Oliver started with the abstract quality of their music. "They were a band that said, 'there is no subject matter'. You couldn't hear what Elizabeth was singing. There were lyrics, but they were all distorted. Her voice was another marvellous instrument. So it was, 'how do you try and place this?'. You couldn't put any subject matter in there, because it was 'our music is not about flowers' or 'the music is not about fishtails'. You're trying to reflect the atmosphere of the music. As a band, they weren't any easier than anybody else. They could never tell you what they wanted. You had to do something before they could reject it, and often, that process went on… But at the end of the day, I think they were happy."

Around 1986 and '87, 4AD signed a clutch of American bands who would take the label through into the next decade, and Oliver developed equally fruitful partnerships with Ultra Vivid Scene, Throwing Muses and, in particular, the Pixies. "I had a great relationship with all three, and with the Pixies, I still do. That was one of the good things about independent music – putting creative control in the bands' hands. What was fantastic at 4AD for me on the visuals side of things was that with, say, the Pixies, there was nobody between me and Charles – the manager stood back. There was no marketing department at 4AD: I was the marketing department. Equally, there was no agent between me and the photographer. So all the creative airwaves were open and fluid."

STRONG IDENTITY

But every golden era has to come to an end. The bands most associated with that time all moved on or split up. Eventually, even Watts-Russell departed, in 1999. Oliver himself had gone freelance in 1987, but though he'd designed sleeves for artists such as David Sylvian and Bush, hadn't exactly found himself overwhelmed by offers of work outside the label. "I think a lot of people saw it as 'this is 4AD and particular to 4AD', and it's the same now. People want their own identity, even though 4AD covered a broad palette of sound and artwork from Colourbox to Voix Bulgares to Pixies. The very thing that was the strength of the label – this identity that we created – has worked against me as a freelancer…"

We'd assume there'd be an army of young bands influenced by the 'classic' 4AD roster, who would sell their kidneys for a Vaughan Oliver sleeve? "Yes, but record companies have their own way of thinking. I used to turn it over in my head – people might think, 'oh, he's going to be expensive'. Also I was never very active in going out and looking for the work."

Oliver has since eased down his work in the music industry, though he continues to work with the reformed Pixies. These days, most of his energies are devoted to teaching the next generation of graphic designers at Epsom.

Oliver welcomes the ongoing vinyl revival. "It's interesting that it's slowly come back round to the value of the object and what that means to have and to hold, to objectify," he suggests. "I always thought it was innate, this desire to have something as an object, that, when you look at your record collection at home, it's a diary as much as anything else. The personal experience is there, the nerve centre of your history and emotions.

"And the younger generation are starting to understand that. When I take this stuff in to students they're so excited about it," he smiles, turning to a reissue of one of his – and 4AD's – greatest hits: the Pixies' *Doolittle*. "If I had a pound for everybody who's said they're doing graphic design because of that…" ●

These days, Oliver works as a visiting professor, passing on his knowledge and experience to the next generation of graphic designers

VAUGHAN OLIVER

PIXIES
DOOLITTLE

"It's the same photograph as the single (*Monkey Gone To Heaven*), but reduced to one colour and with bronze on there to give it an earthy feel. The grid came from a conversation with Charles, where he was explaining that successful music was a mathematical equation – which kind of broke my heart, because I'd had this very romantic notion about it. I thought, 'okay, you're talking about formulas, but we use formulas in painting, like the Golden Section', so the grid was my response."

PIXIES
BOSSANOVA

"Charles gave me examples of lyrics with UFO references, which gave me the planet idea. We put some blue velvet in the background and had the plastic rods made and, to our eyes, it was blue velvet with this clear planet. Simon [Larbalestier, photographer] set his lights up with red filters, just to catch the edge of things. He didn't know they would flood the film. It was a complete accident, but it seemed to fit the B-movie aesthetic, so we went with it."

CLAN OF XYMOX
CLAN OF XYMOX

"They were a Dutch electronic band with a grungy feel to them – that's what led me to create this dirty sleeve. For me, its success is how I arranged the tracklisting. Rather than it being a simple list, it becomes illustration. Here's something that's a small formal element normally, and now it's reversed in the hierarchy. The dirty, rusty look was from a dark-room process where I abused the timing, the chemicals, used wrong exposures, short exposures…"

COCTEAU TWINS
THE SPANGLE MAKER EP

"I think this is the strongest of the ones I did for them. In terms of reflecting the music, the ethereal aspect of their sound and lyrics, it's there in that image. It's from the early days of photography. It looks more like a painting. The typography on the back was also a reference to where I had been working previously in mainstream packaging, on perfumes. It was the first time I had tried that very elegant, classical approach."

CLASSIC COVERS

VAUGHAN OLIVER

LUSH
SPLIT

"The images on *Split* are made by Richard Caldicott, and I loved his graphic division of the colour plains. So in terms of a strong identity, it was already there before you put this mad logo on it. I think it's very cool if a band are confident enough to present themselves as four lemons, though I don't know if they got that, to be honest."

TARNATION
MIRADOR

"My ultimate aspiration is to reflect the feel and atmosphere of the music and I think this does so beautifully. The photographer is Michele Turriani. Again, it's an ethereal feeling – I like the way he can take a wind-blasted tree and shoot it in such a dream-like way, so it places it out of reality. The idea for the typography was 'type becoming image'; I'm wending the lyrics into the image so it becomes as one with it. Like Xymox, it's elevating type within the hierarchy."

THE BREEDERS
MOUNTAIN BATTLES

"Kim [Deal] said to me: 'We don't want any of your eensy-weensy sepia-tinted cottages in the forest'. She also mentioned 'machine inspired art', so I was looking at the shapes in Futurist paintings, which were all very jagged and angular. I had this idea of broken glass. Marc Atkins is the photographer and to me, there's a savage beauty, a violence in it. It seems to chime with the title. Marc got a couple of sheets of glass, which he brought to life through Photoshop."

ULTRA VIVID SCENE
ULTRA VIVID SCENE

"Kurt Ralske would give me images to work with. This was from an advert for Dr. West's toothbrushes, but there's the syringe that hangs there that has one meaning in its advertising form, but you put it on a record sleeve and it becomes more sinister. The tape is just from a piece of packaging I'd had next to my desk for ages. Post-design analysis: I would qualify it as being the view from a height, looking down on a stage – and all the wires are strapped with silver Gaffa." ●

Good vibrations...

Record collectors simply want to hear the music as intended.

When playing records, the needle creates bad vibrations making the record flex. AVID's research shows that turntables equipped with felt mats or plastic platters allow the record to flex excessively, distorting the sound and increasing the risk of damage to your record collection.

AVID turntables uniquely connect the record to the spindle removing these unwanted bad vibrations, lowering the background noise to the inky black level of this advert, so you simply hear music not noise.

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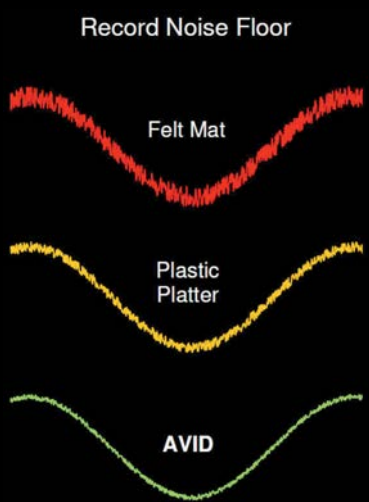

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WE BUILT THIS CITY

Since 1989, Drag City has risen to become one of the world's most prolific independent labels – with an eclectic roster featuring Joanna Newsom, Bill Callahan, Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, Ty Segall and many, many others. **Murray Stassen** gazes inside the world of this Chicago music institution...

Drag City don't chase hit records. What they look for in a new signing – according to Rian Murphy, the man at the helm of this storied Chicago-based business – is "someone with a sense of humour". Humour doesn't pay the bills, though, unless you're a comedian, of course, and the vast catalogue of music this company has released is no joke.

However, Murphy's brief answer to the question of how he would define a typical Drag City signing sums up the sense of community the label has developed over nearly three decades. If an artist shares the company's outlook – whether that's in terms of humour, creative freedom or acceptance of the collective weirdness of all the other individuals on the label combined – then there's a good chance they'll be working together for a long time, regardless of how 'inaccessible' their records may sound.

Drag City's discography includes releases by David Berman's Silver Jews; acclaimed multi-instrumentalist folkie Joanna Newsom; 60s crooner turned 21st-century avant-garde mystic Scott Walker; garage-rock genius Ty Segall; alternative country singer-songwriter Bill Callahan; indie pioneers Pavement, and the off-kilter psychedelic two-piece project of White Fence's Tim Presley and Welsh artist Cate Le Bon, called Drinks.

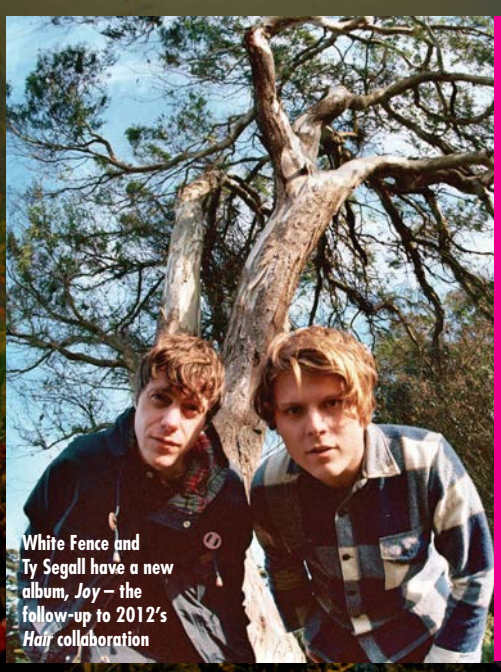
The label's roster is eclectic to say the least, making it easy to see why the company is regularly referred to as "experimental" in the music press; but Murphy tells us that with its music encompassing "various permutations of rock and roll", in no uncertain terms, Drag City identifies as a 'rock' label.

"As it says on the website: 'Guaranteed to satisfy the most tolerant listener'," says Murphy. "We'd like to think that the eclecticism has played a part in what people think of us, but it's ultimately whatever records people like are what defines us."

Drag City was founded by Dan Koretzky and Dan Osborn, who set up the label in Chicago in 1989, releasing its first 7" single (DC1) in 1990 in the form of *Hero/Zero* by Royal Trux, the garage-rock duo consisting of Jennifer Herrema and Neil Hagerty.

DC2 was *Demolition Plot J-7* by cult rockers Pavement. It was their second EP and their first release for Drag City. DC3 and DC4 were the *Twin Infinitives* double LP by Royal Trux and Pavement's *Perfect Sound Forever*.

Pavement went on to sign with Matador, releasing their debut LP *Slanted And Enchanted* on the label in 1992, playing on the same Reading Festival bill as Nirvana and becoming one of the most ▶



White Fence and Ty Segall have a new album, *Joy* – the follow-up to 2012's *Hair* collaboration

Ty Segall

Murphy: "Would you believe it if we told you we'd heard he was the next Cobain, and that's what got us interested? Well, don't, that's bullshit! And it's good it hasn't turned out that way (not just because of the suicide, either). Ty's got an independent way of looking at what he's doing and a desire to keep doing music things that are fun and musically fulfilling, something which we feel very sympathetic to. Ditto for making records that showcase different sides of the same rock – surprises in music are what we love more than anything else. Then, there's the psychedelic guitar solos, plus a nice bonus of institutional rage and an irreverent sense of funny. What's not to love?"

HOW TO GET YOUR RECORD PLAYED IN SHOPS

Drinks

Murphy: "If Mike Donovan's got a rival in the effed-up, but-oddly-on-the-nose lyrics, it's Tim Presley, whose White Fence is yet another great West Coast band we've gotten together with in recent years. Lately, Tim's been working with Cate Le Bon, whose last record we did, after which we did Tim's first solo LP, produced by Cate. In between, they made the first Drinks record, which totally fucked up our whole year back in 2015! As the saying goes, however, second time's the charm. Working with the double threat of Cate and Tim is a heady experience, and we're hoping that all our years in the business up until now have prepared us. But they probably haven't… we'll soon see."

influential indie-rock acts of that decade. Drag City was in there first, though.

What was true for the label back in the early 90s, as described in a 1993 *Spin* article, remains the same to this day. Drag City find artists and release their music way before they are considered critical darlings by the press or public.

Furthermore, while their former peers – such as Matador and Sub Pop – started doing deals with, and selling off percentages of, their companies to bigger music corporations, Drag City are as independent as they were in 1993.

"We hope the current consolidated business model of the future, that turns control over to massive corporate enterprises, will not eventually absorb and eradicate those who wish to do things not aimed at the metrics and demographics of the greatest possible multiples," explains Murphy, commenting on the state of the independent record industry.

"Of course, this was a concern back in the days of major labels and the ubiquity of chain stores," he continues. "There's every possibility that we will survive, cockroach-like, [in] these current waves. But there's another cockroach in the room, and it is looking bigger and stronger than ever, so who knows?" Murphy doesn't make it entirely clear precisely which 'cockroach' he is referring to, but the recent IPO of a certain Swedish streaming giant may offer a clue.

DRAG CITY HAVE ALWAYS HAD A STRONG FOCUS ON VINYL, AND NOTORIOUSLY KEPT THEIR CATALOGUE OFF STREAMING SERVICES

VINYL DEDICATION

Drag City have always had a strong focus on vinyl, and kept their catalogue off streaming services because the deals offered were deemed to be unfair towards the artists. But in July 2017, they finally made much of their repertoire available to stream on Apple Music.

This year, they've made most of their catalogue available on all the other platforms, too, which is a pretty big deal, having held out for so long, with Murphy writing in the label's April newsletter: "Streaming is SO 2015, but we're here for the party now, so – let the pigeons loose! And now that it's really happening, it's, you know, whatever."

But does that mean that Drag City feel there can finally be a healthy coexistence between physical and digital formats? "Apple was most amenable to our terms, which were laid out in an attempt to understand the coexistence between physical and digital," Murphy elaborates. "Anything we do in that area is part of an attempt to try and be heard by the audience that is there and not elsewhere – an audience, we are presuming, made up of the people who no longer buy CDs or download music. As to whether or not it is fairer, or if

Mike Donovan

Murphy: "Sic Alps were the first of these groups, before Ty Segall and Wand. Actually, before Sic Alps was Six Organs Of Admittance… Anyway, Mike's from Sic Alps, and he's in The Peacers now, and making his own solo music on the side. Mike is a real slick songwriter with a flair for his own kind of hooks and production sound. His lyrics make for top-notch brain-addled pop that extends the canonical style for that sort of thing by crashing together psych, punk and industrial in just the right formula. He gets points for introducing us to Tronics. More people will do well to cover him too, like Ty did on *Manipulator*. Killer songs!"

Bill Callahan

Murphy: "It's been five years since the last Bill Callahan record, but he's never far from our thoughts. It's not just that we've worked with him for nearly 30 years… but also because so much of what he's imparted in his songs has settled close to our bones and becomes known again to us on a daily basis. If there were to be something of an evolution in the sound of Drag City… Bill would make a definitive case study, with his early DIY sound and gradual accumulation of rock signifiers in a variety of arrangements over the years. Plus, Bill makes us laugh with a sense of humour that only we can understand, if not share. Very much looking forward to the next we hear from him, but we're willing to wait."

there may be a healthy coexistence, we hope so – but only time will tell." Commenting on the label's long-term dedication to vinyl, however, Murphy says that it's "still the most expressive way of delivering the music".

"It was the main form [of music] when we were coming up and then later, when CDs were beginning to happen, LPs invariably sounded better, plus they looked better. And that never changed." To that end, he says the US and European vinyl revival of the last few years "has been really good" for the label, although he says that he's "not sure that it turned anything around or saved it".

"The margin on LPs is low, and therefore their profitability is much tighter than the potential to profit with CDs, but it is nice that people still look to LPs for a way to hear the music," he says.

RESURRECTION CITY

"For a few years, during the feeding frenzy of 'vinyl is back', which has been a thing for about a decade now, turnaround times were longer. These days, it tends to be easier again. Such are the cycles of our business."

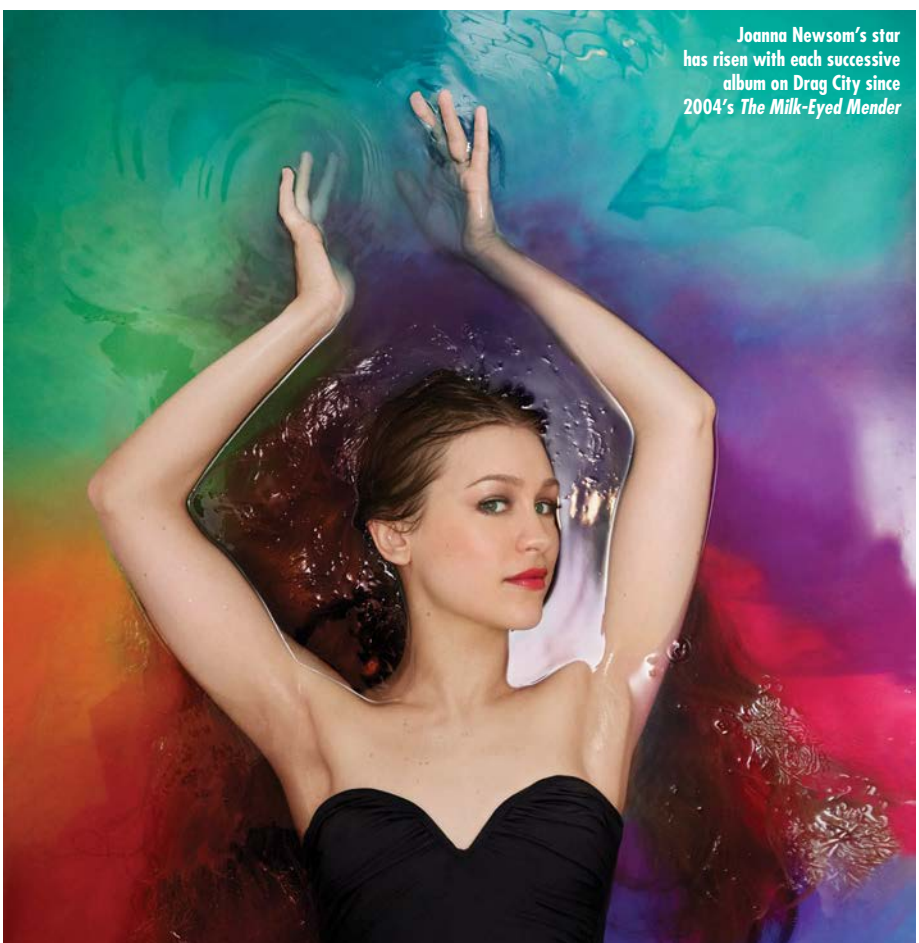
Rian Murphy of Drag City

As well as finding and developing new talent, with an A&R process based largely around recommendations from the label's artists, a big part of Drag City's vinyl output has focused on reissues, resurrecting records by the likes of Manchester's Big Flame, Louisville punk band Squirrel Bait and seminal Detroit proto-punks, Death.

"Looking back at the catalogue, reissues were in the mix right away," agrees Murphy. "The reissue of the 1970 Mayo Thompson album *Corky's Debt To His Father* is still one of the great ones that we've been able to reintroduce. And later, on an entirely different tip, Death.

"We like all kinds of music from all different periods, so it's exciting and fun to be involved with vintage material. As with the rest of the choices on the label, it is something that's decided by the mystery of aesthetics, which may or may not revolve around whether or not something is mind-blowing, funny or weird, or some combination of the three."

Murphy tells us there have been a number of defining moments for the label over the



Joanna Newsom's star has risen with each successive album on Drag City since 2004's *The Milk-Eyed Mender*

Death reformed in 2009 after Drag City reissued their demos

1990 single *Hero/Zero* by Royal Trux was the label's first release

years, mentioning the 1997 Scott Walker album *Tilt* as having "always stood out as a real point of pride".

He also cites a couple of now-legendary festivals (The Drag City Invitational in Chicago and the Drag City Review in New York) held in the early 90s, featuring performances by the likes of Silver Jews, Royal Trux, Pavement and Smog as key events in the label's history.

"A lot of the people we worked with at the time were in attendance and played and hung out, and it was amazing. Looking back, that seems kind of special," he says. "Whenever we have a record land on the Billboard charts, with Bonnie Billy, Joanna Newsom, Ty Segall or whoever, that's always an interesting moment. But the biggest defining moments aren't moments at all. They are the compounded days, months, years and decades of working with these same artists over and over, and delighting at aiding and abetting their musical growth and legacy."

EMOTIONAL TY

The label has released a large body of work by prolific Californian garage-rock star Ty Segall who, over the years, has developed his output from lo-fi, one-man-band noise rock to his most recent LP *Freedom's Goblin*, which spans garage rock, punk, neo-disco and psychedelia.

Co-engineered by legendary producer Steve Albini, the album made it to No. 10 in the official UK Vinyl Album chart in February and No. 1 on the Billboard Vinyl Albums chart. His last two albums, *Ty Segall* (2017) and *Emotional Mugger* (2016), peaked at No. 4 and No. 2 on the Billboard Vinyl Albums chart respectively.

Based on Segall's current career trajectory, Murphy is confident one of his next releases will break into the actual Top 10.

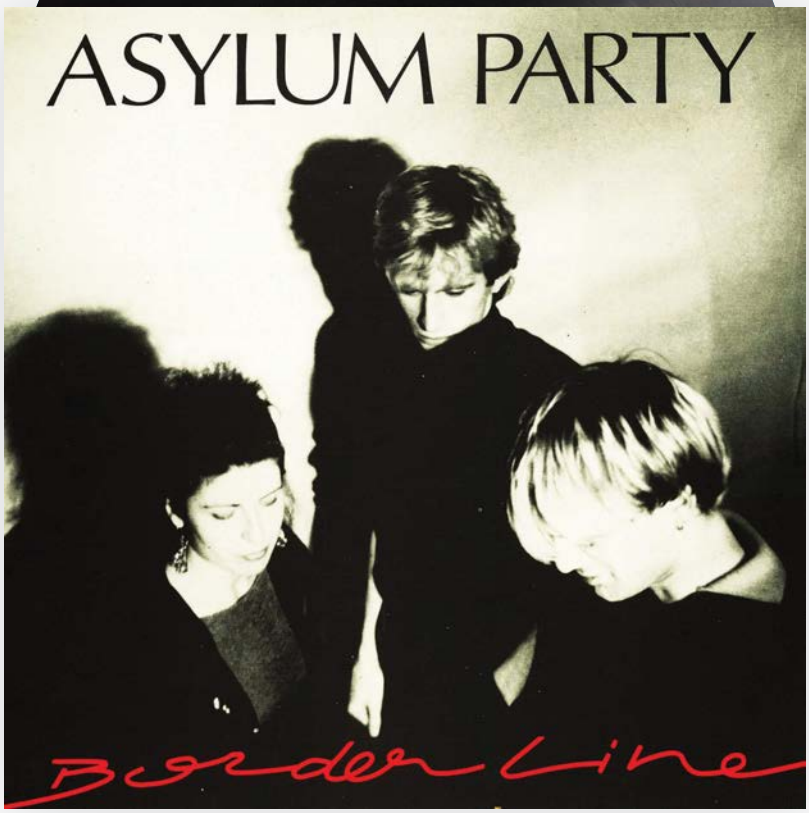
"Absolutely [it will]," he says. "Breaking in and breaking out are both high on the list of distinct possibilities for Ty." With our interview nearing its end, Murphy considers the future of Drag City. "Obviously, it's a way of life that's supported by a staff in addition to the roster of artists, all of which the label supports in return. It continuing allows all of us to keep working. The hope is that the music of all these diverse people continues to be made not simply available – there are many others who can and will step up, if we can't – but to be available from us, as part of our collection of their things."

Murphy also offers advice for anyone trying to make a success of their indie record company: "Bring things you want to the marketplace, keep an eye on the bottom line and work with people you don't think you'll ever have to go to court with," he concludes. "That just ruins everything." ●

OM

Murphy: "We've mostly talked about singer-songwriters… they're a big part of what we do. But the other side of it involves the psychedelic; that which moves you in an enigmatic and physical way. Groups like Ghost and The Fucking Champs have given two extreme versions of this, and then again, there's groups like Six Organs Of Admittance and OM, who have a spiritual thrust and an individual vision. We loved OM as a bass-drums duo, and once they'd come to Drag City and expanded to a trio, our minds were blown again. We thought the whole crux of it was the duo sound; they transformed those bare bones in an unpredictable and compelling way."

Choice Cuts #14



ASYLUM PARTY
BORDERLINE
BLACK VINYL

This album from a French synth band just missed the 'cold wave' at the end of the 80s and, as a result, is a fascinating and collectable rarity...

WAX FACTS
Asylum Party
Borderline
Year **1989**
Format **Black vinyl**
Label **Lively Art**

£195+

The 80s were filled with post-punk and gothic-rock bands, generally catering to a niche market. While several crossed over into mainstream pop, some were destined to stay obscure, garnering only cult status. Some records, unknown to the masses descended into underground lore and became collector's items over time.

One such act was French synth band Asylum Party. They gained notoriety as part of the burgeoning 'cold wave' scene alongside Little Nemo and Mary Goes Round, and with second album *Borderline*, they truly hit their creative peak. The eight tracks drew from the British 'dark wave' movement, while adding extra synths and textures for the cold, icy feel the scene was developing.

Sadly, by the time *Borderline* was released in 1989, the scene had started to move on, spearheaded by The Cure becoming a bona-fide pop band, and Asylum Party were unable to capitalise on what was once a fertile genre. The record itself was pressed in a very limited quantity by French indie label Lively Art, and is now incredibly hard to track down. Copies in the wild were either played to death by adoring fans, or hidden away as prized possessions. Very few ever come up for sale, but prices have reached around £195, with a sealed copy for sale at a higher price.

Despite this rarity, their influence is still apparent today. Soft Kill (who released a split with Asylum Party in 2017) cite them as a major inspiration, and traces of their sound can be heard in Black Marble, Drab Majesty, Choir Boy and others. ***Glen Bushell***

OWN YOUR MUSIC!

OWN YOUR MUSIC!

LEFT CHANNEL
RIGHT CHANNEL
PAUSE
PLAY
STOP

ANALOGUE
OCTOBER
RECORDS

ANALOGUE OCTOBER RECORDS
CHICHESTER

Craig Crane already has a hugely successful career in special FX for blockbuster movies – and he's even had a hand in George from *Rainbow*. **Gary Walker** heads to Chichester on the hunt for Analogue October, Crane's new vinyl-only shop…

With a prestigious film and TV career under his belt that saw him work as a puppeteer for Jim Henson before becoming a self-employed animator, you'd have been forgiven for questioning Craig Crane's sanity when, in 2017, he announced his intention to invest a six-figure sum in opening a record shop.

Having 'been' George on cult children's TV show *Rainbow*, and worked on *The Muppet Christmas Carol* and *Spitting Image*, Crane foresaw the impact of the coming digital revolution on puppeteering. He set up his own visual effects studio, working on Hollywood movies such as the *Harry Potter* series, *Thor* and *Avengers*, and adding stellar clients such as Disney, Marvel and Warner Bros to his CV.

However, Crane decided to press pause on that high-intensity lifestyle, one day finding himself walking down South Street in the West Sussex county city of Chichester and passing a vacant shop unit that had housed a vintage sweetshop.

That transformative moment coincided with a challenge the lifelong record collector had set himself – a digital detox, banishing listening to music through non-analogue devices from his life.

MASTER OF PUPPETS

"I remember speaking to one of our suppliers now, and telling him I had this crazy idea to open a record shop, and he said: 'Are you effing mad?'," recalls Crane. "We've become firm mates since then, because I really enjoyed his honesty.

"I've spent 30 years working in the film industry. I started in the late 80s as a puppeteer for Jim Henson on the *Muppets* movies, then I did *Spitting Image*. I was George on *Rainbow* for three or four years in the early 90s, then I saw the bottom fall out of that horrendously, because two things happened: they changed the way that TV was governed and all the big stations got sold off in franchises; also, computer animation kicked off. "I remember going to see *Toy Story* and thinking: 'That's it, we're done, everything's going to be computerised now'. I was right, but I taught myself how to animate on the computer.

"It's a very stressful industry. There's no relenting from the amount of emails you get when you're in the middle of a big film like *Avengers* or *Doctor Strange*; you receive 250 to 300 emails a day, all asking the same question in a different way. I would try to listen to music on my phone and you'd suddenly find Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew* was being interrupted by an email notification popping up – I don't think Miles had that in mind.

"I decided about four years ago that enough was enough. I would use my phone as a phone-and-email device, but completely disconnect and do a month using only analogue devices for my mobile listening needs. All my friends scoffed and said: 'You'll only last a couple of days', but that was the red rag to a bull. I'm one of those people who doesn't do anything by half…

"I'd never stopped buying vinyl, but I'd fallen into that digital 'instant gratification, no satisfaction' trap. I collect Walkmen, ▶

> "I STARTED IN THE LATE 80S AS A PUPPETEER FOR JIM HENSON ON THE *MUPPETS* MOVIES, THEN I DID *SPITTING IMAGE*. I WAS GEORGE ON *RAINBOW* FOR THREE OR FOUR YEARS IN THE EARLY 90S"
>
> **CRAIG CRANE**

had a huge number of blank tapes and my record collection was there just waiting to be taped. It was an amazing success, but what I didn't realise is it would turn into a shop. The month-long experiment – I kept on doing it, and I haven't listened to music on my phone, downloaded or streamed in four years."

Chichester, 20 miles east along the A27 from Portsmouth and 30 miles west of Brighton, proved to be the ideal spot for Crane, who grew up in South London.

"I spent my youth in record shops," he recalls. "I was fortunate enough to grow up in Croydon. We had an absolute plethora of record shops – Beanos, L&H Cloake's, Our Price… there were some great little shops by West Croydon bus station that specialised in jazz, funk and soul. It was a great time to grow up.

"I live in a town where our only shop [selling new vinyl] is HMV, or a nondescript delivery driver leaving a record outside your house or throwing it over the garden fence. Chichester needed a record shop – we've got Pie & Vinyl in Portsmouth, Resident in Brighton and nothing in the middle."

SHOP, STOCK...

"I was filming in Africa last year and we were halfway through the last *Maze Runner* film. I saw this shop that used to be a vintage sweetshop, and it had a To Let sign outside. The landlord was desperate to get a business in there, so I thought, 'this is it. If I don't do this now, I'll never do it'. I looked at the figures and, all-in, it looked like it was going to be a £150,000 investment – all the stock, the shop fit, the equipment, the alarm, everything. It's a 15th-century building, Grade II listed, that we had to completely gut. The electrical wiring looked like it had been done in the medieval ages. We stocked it initially through wholesale, but as Record Store Day loomed near, we realised that we needed to establish good, solid relationships with the majors. Within about a month of opening, we started to cast our net further afield, getting stuff a little bit cheaper. But we still have a fantastic relationship with our original wholesaler."

Entering Analogue October, you're met by a compact, stylish wooden-floored space, with Crane's restored reel-to-reel tape machines front and centre; repeat visits are rewarded, as fresh surprises reveal themselves, and somewhat boldly, Crane stocks only new releases. "I don't sell second-hand records," he says.

> WE HAD AN ABSOLUTE PLETHORA OF RECORD SHOPS – BEANOS, L&H CLOAKE'S, OUR PRICE… THERE WERE SOME GREAT LITTLE SHOPS BY WEST CROYDON BUS STATION SPECIALISING IN JAZZ, FUNK AND SOUL
>
> **CRAIG CRANE**

"I like to do things properly – I come from an industry where the fruits of your labour are projected on to screens for all to see, warts and all. So we strive to make everything as good as it can be. It's the same with the shop. Visually and ethically. I don't want to be the guy who opens a second-hand record shop in the heart of Chichester, where there are two very well established shops – Helter Skelter and Time Machine – who've been there for years and have a loyal customer base. If we sold second-hand records we'd be detrimental to them. It'd be wrong of me.

"The other reason is I'm still running my film visual-effects studio, and the last thing I want to do after a long day is drive 20 miles into the South Downs to see some old lady's record collection, where she swears blind she's sitting on gold and it's a James Last *Reader's Digest* boxset she's never bothered to open!"

RSD OCTOBER

Along with those 3,700 new records, Crane also stocks turntables, participates in Record Store Day and is planning to expand into live in-store performances; he says the shop has been embraced by the cathedral city's population of 26,000 since opening its doors in November.

"The opening day, I was very nervous," he says. "I'd put a lot of money and time into it, and it was always going to be an unknown commodity as to whether it was going to succeed – because Chichester has record shops and people also like to shop online. I needed to get people to wind the clock back and show them that while buying records in a shop may not have the infinite choices you have online, that's the place where you make your musical discoveries.

"It was about getting people to disconnect from their current habits, put the phone down, have a glass of wine and let the superior sound of vinyl wash over them. I was really pleased with Record Store Day; we were very careful with what we got. There were two questions we asked: do my customers want this and do I want to be left with

CRAIG'S LIST

Four choice cuts from Crane's collection

MILES DAVIS
TUTU
"Bunking off college in 1987, my student grant had cleared in my account, Tower Records, Piccadilly… the cover caught me. I had to buy it and I didn't know why, but it just blew me away. There are covers that are better than the originals, the production blew my mind and it sent me on a Miles Davis journey."

STANLEY CLARKE
SCHOOL DAYS
"I'm an amazing air bassist! This is just an album that delivers everything, from sublime mellow compositions through to absolute thumping funk… It comes from a time when I was just stepping away from Level 42, Shakatak, Imagination, and broadening my musical horizons."

JACO PASTORIUS
JACO PASTORIUS
"I became aware of him through my absolute fascination with Weather Report. His story is typical of rock and jazz at the time – the influence of drugs and all those other things, and yet he still managed to make his mark, and there's no doubt about his legacy. It's a great album and one I never tire of."

VARIOUS ARTISTS
JAZZ JUICE
"It was a compilation series put together by Morgan Khan. He bought out a label called StreetSounds Jazz Juice. I've still got all my originals in absolutely fantastic condition, and those compilations really opened up my musical ears. There's some really crazy stuff on them and I was hooked from the first one."

it – is it considered viable stock throughout the rest of the year? We printed out the list when it was announced, had a spreadsheet in the shop and asked all of our Facebook followers to come in and tick what they wanted, and that really informed how we ordered.

"It wasn't an exercise in filling the till; it was an exercise in further developing the friendships we have with our current customers, making new friendships and giving the shop a good shot at still being on the high street this time next year."

3.1 – IT'S THE MAGIC NUMBER

Aside from the overwhelming success of the shop's first Record Store Day, Crane has quickly developed a hardcore of regular customers, who he says fall into three (and a bit) categories.

"I've got 3.1 types of customers: the kids coming to vinyl for the first time with their Crosley Cruisers; guys and girls who had vinyl and lost it through house moves, divorce or buying into digital and are finding it again; the die-hard music-lover audiophiles who never let get go; and the 0.1 customer is the customer who comes in asking if we buy record collections – I can tell them a mile off, and nine times out of 10, I manage to turn them round when I ask them: 'Are you sure you want to get rid of them? Would you sell a photo album? By selling those records you're getting rid of all the memories associated with that record – who you were, what you were doing, who you were in love with. The minute you get rid of your records, it's all gone'. They say: 'I've got nothing to play them on, though'. Well, that's okay, we sell new turntables, too!

"My musical bias is jazz, soul, funk, a bit of fusion, but we're not a specialist shop. Chichester isn't that kind of area. I wouldn't say it's an old population, but there's an eclectic mix of tastes. There's heavy metal; your middle-aged guys into prog rock who are buying back their youth; the kids who are keen to track down the latest cassette from Burger Records; there are guys like myself who love soul; there's a massive ska movement on the south coast, and we can get anything in. It's not a specialist shop, it's a shop that offers you a lot of choice you wouldn't get elsewhere."

Six months on from that fork-in-the-road moment when Crane first pondered the idea of setting up shop, business is booming. He's successfully juggling running a record store with his own studio, and the decision doesn't seem so mad after all. He's quick to acknowledge the role played by his staff in both businesses, and says the key to Analogue October's success is – as with every truly great record shop – that it feels like more than just a shop to its customers.

"I have staff on the film side of things who are very self-sufficient and I have staff in the shop – a Saturday girl who is awesome, Steph, and I've got Andy and Nikki who are both ex-Our Price, who have amazing backgrounds in record retail. Their input has been invaluable, and my eldest Charlotte manages our film crew wherever in the world they are, but still finds time to help in the shop.

"Analogue October is a very laid-back shop, very social. I always say to my regular customers – 'pop in, we'll put the kettle on, have a Hobnob and a chat, there's no pressure to buy anything'.

"As [*Last Shop Standing* author] Graham Jones says: it's part record shop, part social care…" ●

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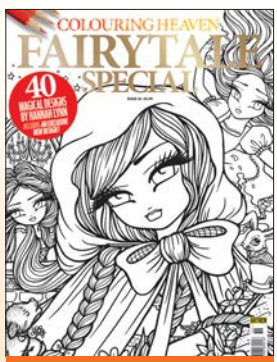

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The Trip

Belfast

Collector Mark Elliott takes a trip to the Northern Irish capital and finds a varied selection of vinyl stockists and great prices

That Belfast has clawed its way into the Top 10 UK weekend-break destinations is testament enough to the remarkable transformation this once-troubled community has undergone in the past couple of decades. Tourism is big business and, buoyed by major investment projects such as Titanic Belfast, it's easy to see why its popularity is soaring. But what of the record shopping?

Two high-profile closures in recent months – Sick Records and Head, which was based in Ireland – have hit the headlines, but not the confidence of the retailers I spoke to in the city. Music is ingrained into the psyche of this place and, from traditional folk to the international success of acts such as Ash and Snow Patrol, everyone's got an angle or a story to share about somebody. People can really talk here! The cab driver who drove me in from the airport gave me a track-by-track narrative of his experience of seeing The Beatles at Belfast's King's Hall in November 1964 as a young boy.

Even the concierge at the hotel asked if I was interested in his Van Morrison encounters when I told him why I was here. I wasn't, in truth – I'd only asked for directions to the shopping area.

As in every city, people spoke fondly about the time when you could buy music everywhere. The bustling Smithfield Market and Gresham Street centres were referenced widely but, across the half-dozen or so places to pick up records, I found plenty to be optimistic about. The city is twinned with Nashville (my trip actually coincided with the Belfast Nashville Songwriters Festival), and with events such as the Sonorities Music Festival and venues such as the Oh Yeah Music Centre, there's certainly no shortage of music to experience, even if that's no longer defined by a weekly 7" purchased with pocket money.

Music is ingrained into the psyche of this place – everyone's got an angle or a story to share

The prices for second-hand vinyl were universally good and there's a pretty diverse range to look through. Just don't expect anyone to appreciate your prized finds – the knowing humour designed to deflate unwieldy egos and, no doubt, tensions of the past will be used on you to devastating effect.

More than once, my enthusiasm for, say, the largely forgotten early 90s boy band Worlds Apart raised an eyebrow and a sharp quip. You take it in good spirit, because this city genuinely brings a smile to your face. Everyone will tell you that there's much still to settle here, but the charm and growing confidence is infectious. Get over here fast, because on the strength of my experience at least, the city's popularity will continue to soar.

Illustration Ben Talon

❶ TOP SOUNDS
St George's Market, 12-20 East Bridge Street, BT1 3NQ
belfastcity.gov.uk
Opening hours
10am to 3pm Friday;
10am to 4pm Sunday

❷ TIMESLIP RECORDS
44a Botanic Avenue, BT7 1JR
timesliprecords.co.uk
Opening hours
10am to 6pm
Monday to Saturday;
1pm to 6pm Sunday

❸ OCTOPUS'S GARDEN
11a Wellington Street, BT1 6HT
facebook.com/OctopussGardenBelfast
Opening hours
10.30am to 6pm
Monday to Saturday;
1pm to 5.30pm Sunday

❹ BELFAST UNDERGROUND RECORDS
33 Upper Queen Street, BT1 6EA
belfastunderground.co.uk
Opening hours
10am to 6pm
Monday to Saturday

❺ DRAGON RECORDS
58 Wellington Place, BT1 6GF
dragonrecordsbelfast.blogspot.co.uk
Opening hours
11am to 6pm
Monday to Friday;
10am to 6pm Saturday

❻ PREMIER RECORD STORES
3-5 Smithfield Square, BT1 1JE
Opening hours
9.30am to 5.30pm
Monday to Saturday

❼ YOUNG SAVAGE
22 Church Lane, BT1 4QN
Opening hours
10am to 6pm
Monday to Saturday;
1.30pm to 5.30pm Sunday

BELFAST

1 TOP SOUNDS

The last surviving Victorian market in the city is widely regarded as one of the UK's best, despite some stiff competition from venues such as London's Spitalfields. It's a grand beast of a structure – the regal red-brick building framing a buzzing and sizeable trading floor. On Fridays, you'll find a bit of everything and Sunday's market is a bit more arts and crafts orientated but, on both days, Andy Paraskos mans a big pitch selling a decent range of everything at keen prices. He buys as well as sells and, on my visit, the Sunday stall is packed – I'd rate it as the busiest in the whole market. One woman haggles over a price for some vintage soul and then spends an age faffing around with a card payment (don't those people drive you crazy?), but I'm prepared to wait, as I'm finally about to broaden my Sal Solo collection. The former Classix Nouveaux frontman had one solo hit – 1985's *San Damiano (Heart & Soul)* – but I'd never sourced the MCA follow-ups on 12" despite on-off hunting. Here they both are, for a couple of pounds apiece. A bit of 90s dance – Snap!'s *The Madman's Return* LP – and the soundtrack to the BBC's TV series *Christabel*, featuring a very young Liz Hurley, complete what is actually an impromptu stop on the obligatory bus tour during our first day. Grabbing some 'street' food on the go, a local singer-songwriter performs with his guitar… it feels as though we've really arrived.

2 TIMESLIP RECORDS

The furthest vinyl outpost from the city centre, situated near the prestigious university, is actually only a brisk 15-minute walk away. Timeslip's ground-floor racks have familiar stock, but the seasoned among you will know that dutiful digging through this stuff will yield the odd welcome find. No Roxy acetates here but, at £1 apiece, what do you expect?

Upstairs, it's a rather different story. The store opened in early summer last year and, alongside some vintage clothing, it has really hit its stride. Timeslip's owner Mike Bates has balanced some racks of new stock with plenty of second-hand gems. "We try really hard to keep prices reasonable," says Stephen McConvill, who works here. "People are coming in for stuff like *Parallel Lines* all the time, and I've really noticed a lot of younger people buying more 80s recently."

3 OCTOPUS'S GARDEN

I run into Mike Bates in the next store and this city-centre vintage clothing and record emporium is quite something. It's a mirror-image of Timeslip, with a decent unit of more collectable vinyl on the ground floor (where you'll find the faded 501s) this time, while upstairs lies a cavernous multi-room odyssey into the murkier depths of crate digging. Piles upon piles of vinyl are stacked in no order whatsoever, and everything will come as a surprise. The truly interesting stock is certainly cherry-picked for downstairs but, if your tastes are broad, there's plenty here. Chris Isaak singles (with bingo tickets still attached) sit alongside white-label PWL releases (which has my heart beating faster), and lots more besides. There's a mountain of MOR and country that will likely still be there this time next year, but pop and dance are well represented, too. In an hour, I barely scratch the surface. "Things are going well," says Mike, and he plans to open another record shop in the city later this summer. "I think if you go back to the times of The Troubles, record shops here were these ivory towers where people congregated to get away from it all," he tells me. "I'm compiling a coffee-table book about the old record shops in the city, so am looking for old memorabilia – we've picked up loads of old record-store bags and price labels – and people's memories, of course." Mike is tempted to join Record Store Day in 2019 but, for now, is set on making this growing chain a success, and points to the new vinyl at Timeslip as encouraging. "We're seeing a resurgence across the board," he says. "But good independent shops will always have a customer base if they keep evolving and work hard to stay ahead." Just as long as he doesn't get too slick; shops such as these offer hours of marvellous crate digging for those who have passed the point of no return…

"Good independent shops will always have a customer base if they keep evolving and work hard to stay ahead"

4 BELFAST UNDERGROUND RECORDS

Multitasking on a mammoth scale, Belfast Underground has a huge audience for its internet radio station, serving almost 200 countries and playing a bit of everything, in truth. Footfall to the three-year-old city-centre store is a varied affair, with nearly as many people coming to see the station as coming to shop, but there's a lot here to tempt anyone, with an especially strong dance offering. Each year, the shop takes part in Record Store Day, and I find a decent range of editions from last year still available, which makes me consider popping back soon after this year's event, if I can. The 7" racks are plentiful and I'm told there's a big rise in the number of collectors for this format. I find some interesting stuff: The Damned's gatefold edition of *The Shadow Of Love* with its insightful listing of 1985 UK tour dates across its gatefold spread (5 July was a day off between Bradford

section suggests the decks get quite a bashing at weekends, and everything is priced fairly (cards aren't accepted here). I pick up a VG+ copy of Siouxsie And The Banshees' *Christine* 7", which I've often seen, but rarely in a clean picture-sleeve. The cheap sections yield more random purchases, including Luther Vandross's *I Really Didn't Mean It*. I even pick up a Fleetwood Mac disc – not the often-referenced *Rumours* (which every dealer worth his or her salt wants dozens of decent second-hand copies of) but the 12" of *Seven Wonders*, which has a superb Jellybean remix and completes my *Tango In The Night* singles set. Also-rans from the early 80s The Farmer's Boys released their debut LP with a free 12" single, but it still didn't really do the business for them. I like the band's perky power-pop, so this mint LP with the accompanying 12" is quite a find.

5 DRAGON RECORDS

Now, this is more of a traditional record shop, with stock filed clearly and discs – a lot of them collectable – tidied up and sleeved ready for your perusal. Dragon has a reputation for metal and punk, but actually, there's a lot more here besides. A decent dance

Belfast Underground offers studios and courses in DJ skills and production – a step up from the more usual coffee-and-cake brand extension

and Chester, fact fans) and Sinéad O'Connor's *My Special Child* from 1991. There's also a good range of accessories for sale here and the brand even offers studio facilities and an academy teaching courses in DJ skills and production. I'm fired up by the idea of record shops developing these business models – a distinct and ambitious step up from the more typical coffee-and-cake brand extension. Imagine my multi-platform empire, where I could subject the planet to limitless Hazell Dean and Hot Chocolate online, while tutoring the impressionable on the dubious merits of the stuttering, synth-heavy extended remix! Perhaps the world should wait a little longer for that.

6 PREMIER RECORD STORES

I often visit shops proudly celebrating two decades of trading, but Premier puts them all to shame – in just eight years' time, this Smithfield Square institution will celebrate its 100-year anniversary. Billed as Ireland's oldest record shop – and I doubt anyone will dispute that – it's a store steeped in tradition, not least in the largely native music that still populates its shelves. For many years, Premier was run by Billy McBurney; his father, who played clarinet at the Grand Opera House, had spotted the business opportunity, as so little Irish music was available to buy then; and it was Billy who started to stock American imports when he saw the direction in which the tide was turning. But traditional music remained his passion, he told a local newspaper, and today, it would be fair to say he was on the right side of history, for this store's clientele, at least. There's little vinyl, in truth, but the shop is busy with people buying country and folk CDs. County Carlow native Derek Ryan spent time in boy band D-Side before his country reinvention: he's become one of Ireland's biggest acts on that scene. His 2017 album *Perfect Days* was released on vinyl and is a rare example of local music making it onto that format. Premier's only copy has just been reserved, so I make do with a mint second-hand version of *The Very Best Of ELO* which, at £10, is half the price I would pay in Belfast's HMV, and an unplayed picture-sleeve copy of The Jam's *Live* EP (issued with *Snap!*). There's more vinyl on sale in the run-up to Christmas, I'm told, but many months out, there are only a couple of boxes of second-hand discs to go through.

7 YOUNG SAVAGE

Ken McNeilly's quirky vintage shop right near the city centre has a very good vinyl department up on its top floor (top tip: Ken's happy for you to leave any shopping at the ground-floor counter, as the staircase is, well, steep and atmospheric). Your ascent will be worth your while, as there's an eclectic range of second-hand stock here that yields some rich pickings, including the choice find of my trip – the Black Diamond DJ-only double-pack of Sybil's *Good 'N' Ready* LP paired with some mixes of the SAW should-have-been-a-smash *Beyond Your Wildest Dreams*.

It's a fabulous find for a PWL fanatic like me – and it alone makes the whole Belfast trip worthwhile. It likely came from a collection Ken has acquired. "I was called by a working men's club that had an enormous amount of late 80s and later dance stuff that they wanted to get rid of," he tells me. I source a whole stash of Disco Mix Club releases, featuring of-the-moment treatments of acts like ABC, Jaki Graham and Cameo. The May 1987 volume features an interesting Ben Liebrand mix of Prince's *Quakehouse*, which often attracts collectors' attention. It's mine for just £2. "I get a lot of DJs coming in for this sort of stuff," Ken says. "It really is surprising what's shifting these days. I'm getting 16-year-olds here for the Stones and Zeppelin, and then buying some Kylie or later Queen." What isn't shifting is hip-hop or reggae (beyond the Beastie Boys or Marley). Ken estimates vinyl has represented 10% of his turnover in the year since he started stocking it. With his interest in getting more metal, two-tone and punk to sell, it's clear that percentage is certain to increase. It's a fabulous end to a successful day. The legendary Irish charm I've found here has certainly hooked me in. This is a great place for crate digging. ●

"It really is surprising what's shifting these days. I'm getting 16-year-olds here for the Stones and Zeppelin, and then buying some Kylie or later Queen"

Top five

1 THE SOUND OF MUSIC
Belfast is packed with fabulous venues, including Belfast Waterfront, which has played host to Joan Baez and Bryan Ferry; Ulster Hall, recently showcasing gigs by Weller and The Stranglers, and SSE Arena, with most of the major national treks. Adele launched her international tour here back in February 2016.

2 MY HEART WILL GO ON
The Titanic is everywhere in Belfast and has played a pivotal part in revolutionising the city's tourism offering. Titanic Belfast is a world-class six-floor exhibit you have to make time for, but the tram ride around the docks (theweetram.com) is worth a look, too. I promise you won't hear Celine Dion's record-breaking theme too many times…

3 THE GOOD OLD DAYS
Music plays a huge part in the culture here and there's a Traditional Music Trail (belfasttradtrail.com), which really brings the genre to life. This walking tour around Cathedral Quarter is great and there's a tipple en route to keep you going! Other venues, like The Dirty Onion and Duke Of York, have regular gigs. Check out visitbelfast.com for listings.

4 THE FUN OF THE FAIR
The Belfast Record Fair is held four times a year at the Oh Yeah Music Centre. A couple of retailers said I really need to come back for this – and I intend to! Listings (and dates) are available from facebook.com/belfastrecordfair.

5 WE ARE GIANTS…
If you're heading out of the city – and Giant's Causeway is sure to be on everyone's bucket list – then a top recommendation further afield is Londonderry's Cool Discs at 6 Lesley House, Foyle Street. The A6 is your route to Northern Ireland's second city – also known as Derry – and will take you about 90 minutes by car. Giant's Causeway is about an hour's drive from here.

The Trip

Getting there

Belfast is served by two airports – the closest, George Best Belfast City, is just three miles from the centre and an express bus runs from the terminal every 20 minutes or so. The International Airport is about 30 minutes' drive and there is a shuttle bus to bring you in, while a cab will set you back about £30. The ferry to Cairnryan (just over two hours) or Liverpool (eight hours) is another option. Once you're in Belfast, it's easy to walk between all of these shops, but buses are cheap and plentiful. In better weather, Belfast Bikes offer a fun way to get around, but you might have trouble balancing all those buys on the handlebars! Dublin Coach runs down to the Republic and there are good train links across the Province and into Éire.

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DIGGING FOR VICTORY

Hunting down record collections in Brixton in the 1990s, **Mark O'Shaughnessy** comes across a haul of the unexpected kind

It wasn't too long after I started out as a professional record dealer in 1992/1993 (where did those 25 years go?) that I began to become 'creative' in my search for the Black Gold. I was living smack-dab in the middle of Brixton at the time (just behind the Ritzy Cinema, if you know the area) and historically, Brixton has always been an absolute goldmine for black music – reggae in particular, obviously.

A brief word about Brixton here: back then, it wasn't 'hipster central' like it is now, it was mostly still a dog-rough, run-down, very dangerous and scary place – particularly after dark. It had always been a centre for reggae shops and distribution throughout the 60s and 70s and there were still several stores dotted around the place (Blacker Dread, as recently featured on the TV doc *Being Blacker*, being one of them), so there just had to be loads of good reggae collections in the area, it was just working out how to get my hands on them.

So I popped cards in several newsagents' windows around the area, placed ads in a couple of local rags and sat back waiting for the phone to ring. And ring it did. After a couple of false starts and close shaves with one or two shadier 'collectors' locally, my first real lead came through. The conversation went something like this:

Caller: "You de record man?"

Me: "Yes…"

Caller: "Come then, me got music like dirt."

He then proceeded to put the phone down without saying even one more word. Thankfully, this was in the early days of BT's new telephony, so I was able to do 1471 and call the guy back to get his address. It was two streets from where I lived, on a place called Railton Road, which had been the frontline during the 1981 Brixton riots. I rapped the door and Winston, an elderly chap (late 60s at a guess), opened up. The heat from the flat hit me like a wall, and this was on an already boiling-hot July morning. The heating was on! God help the records, I thought. Winston's wife was sat looking out of the window onto the balcony, cooling herself with a giant fan, wordless.

He took me through to the record room. My heart jumped. There was a whole wall of LPs, spine out, looking very clean and tidy, in artist order, too… yesssss, I thought. But there were no windows in this room; thick shag-pile carpet on the floor and not a fan in sight. I was about to melt. I started poking through the LPs and they were just as good as I'd hoped. But there wasn't one reggae LP in the whole lot. Instead, there was a whole slew of 1960s/70s, USA/UK and European jazz, with several titles I'd not even ever seen before, let alone been able to buy!

I just had to ask an also-sweltering Winston: "Where on earth did you get all of these amazing jazz LPs?" Winston went on to explain to me that he used to be in the RAF and that they used to swap records with the US airmen back in the 60s and 70s – British and Jamaican reggae was bartered for USA Blue Note and Prestige LPs of the same era.

The heat from the flat hit me like a wall, and this was on an already boiling-hot July morning. The heating was on! God help the records, I thought

We agreed a (huge) price – the most I'd ever paid for any collection in my young career until that point. My hands were trembling. I then went off to round up every single penny I could beg, steal or borrow to buy this man's amazing jazz-LP collection – it was one of the finest I've ever had the privilege of handling during my career, and, to all jazz buffs out there, I'd just like to say "Clarke Boland Sextet – *Music For The Small Hours*" on gold-label German Brunswick press – yes, that Jazz Grail was actually sat in a mummified room in a first-floor flat on a Brixton council estate in the early 1990s! Even then, that LP was worth £600, so God only knows what it would make now…

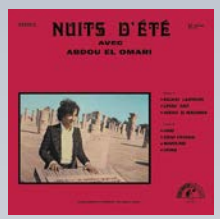
I went back later that day and handed Winston over a huge bundle of cash and started loading the LPs into my car, still barely able to believe what I'd found. I was to have one more encounter with Winston about a year later, but that's another story.

It just goes to show that in the record business, preconceptions can be very easily shattered, right? ●

Mark O'Shaughnessy is the owner of Bath record shop Resolution Records and has been a professional record dealer since 1993

Habibi Funk

This label ferrets out and compiles Middle Eastern and African sounds from the 70s and 80s, which slam together soul, funk, rock, pop and more into a compelling and exotic blend. **Chris Parkin** talks to label founder Jannis Stürtz about his Arabian odyssey…



Habibi Funk's Jannis Stürtz didn't intend to set up a label fixated on funk-and-soul-inspired music from the Arab world, but during a chance trip to Casablanca with his other label Jakarta Records five years ago, he saw the light. In the back room of an electronics shop, Stürtz dusted off a 7" single featuring a raw cover of James Brown's *Papa's Got A Brand New Bag* by Fadaul Et Les Privilèges. Sung entirely in Arabic, it kicks like a mule. Stürtz was hooked.

Habibi Funk's first release, however, didn't see the light of day for another two-and-a-half years. Stürtz's idea was set like concrete, but he first had to find Fadoul, the bandleader responsible for his epiphany. Stürtz began knocking on doors and showing Casablanca coffee-shop habitués photos of Fadoul on the sleeves he'd unearthed, until he tracked down his relatives. "The licensing for that first album took over a year of trying to find them," laughs Stürtz.

The 2015 compilation *Al Zman Saib* is a collection of agreeably coarse and snappish funk by Fadoul, who died in 1991. Now the Berlin label is onto its eighth collection of music from the region – *Muslims And Christians* by politicised Sudanese funk singer Kamal Keila. It fulfils the label's credo of focusing, says Stürtz, on a "very particular niche sound in the Arab world". For the sake of brevity, this is 70s and 80s music from the region that mangles local sounds with Western soul, funk and rock, and strange pop mutations such as Arabian Zouk and Lebanese AOR. "It's this type of exchange that really interests us," explains Stürtz.

The label has become something of a cliché-busting endeavour that paints the region in new shades for many people. Stürtz admits it is "comparatively conservative, with vast differences from country to country", but his crate-digging excursions have proved to him that music fans are the same the world over. "People having fun, dancing, drinks. I never had any issues. People have a very stereotypical idea of the what the reality of the region is."

THE LABEL HAS BECOME SOMETHING OF A CLICHÉ-BUSTING ENDEAVOUR THAT PAINTS THE REGION IN NEW SHADES. "PEOPLE HAVE A VERY STEREOTYPICAL IDEA OF WHAT THE REALITY OF THE REGION IS," EXPLAINS STÜRTZ

Habibi Funk's records, contextualised with sleevenotes and photos, instead highlight that artists from the region seek the same release – creative or otherwise – as musicians everywhere.

Arabic music from the 70s and 80s is relatively unplundered compared to music from the same period in West and Central Africa, but it does still have a following in Arab nations. Stürtz is at pains, then, to market releases from which artists and their families get 50% of the profits, to the region it is from. "There is a lot of interest there in the stuff we do, which is a privilege. It would be far less meaningful for me if it's only done for a Western audience."

With more Sudanese releases on the horizon, exploring the country's 80s jazz and electronic scenes, as well as a collection of music by Moroccan gnawa-funk band Attarazat Addahabia, Habibi Funk is just getting into its groove. "We certainly don't plan to slow down!" ●

The Rolling Stones

THE STUDIO ALBUMS VINYL COLLECTION 1971-2016

UNIVERSAL

If The Rolling Stones should have learned anything from their 50-plus years as a going concern, it's surely that sticking to what you know best isn't an unpardonable sin. There are shapeshifting artists down the years who've successfully hitched a ride on chart fashions and made acclaimed career U-turns in the process (Bowie, Madonna and Damon Albarn among them), but the Stones are not in that category. Evidence of this is in plentiful supply on this enormous 15-album collection that covers their studio output from 1971 onwards. Remastered at half speed at Abbey Road from the original tapes, these 180g heavyweight albums are housed in a sexy lenticular box.

We join the fun halfway through the Stones' peerless four-album run that started with *Beggars Banquet* and *Let It Bleed*, making amends for the creative misstep of psychedelic folly *Their Satanic Majesties Request*. *Sticky Fingers* (1971), which kicks off this boxset, is all killer and no filler: the band are at their creative and empathic peak here, with Mick Taylor in particular on stunning form.

The glorious mess of the sprawling *Exile On Main St.* has since been enshrined in rock legend as the Stones at their most debauched. It's a wonderful rambling tangle of a record – recorded badly in places, but positively spilling over with vicarious thrills.

Then, as most Stones fans will know, the ride gets a little bumpier – as the band have never been that consistently brilliant again. A trend begins to emerge on *Goats Head Soup* and *It's Only Rock 'N Roll*, which tends to hold firm for the vast majority of the remainder of their recording career: each album boasts three or four crackers worthy of inclusion on one of their global enormo tours, alongside plenty of filler. Jagger's tendency to chase trends leads to some major howlers – the cod reggae of *Cherry Oh Baby* and pallid funk of *Hey Negrita* on *Black And Blue* are just two glaring examples.

The reaction to being labelled rock dinosaurs by the punk brigade pays dividends on the taut *Some Girls*, and *Emotional Rescue* has its moments, too. A surfeit of decent unreleased material is tickled up so that *Tattoo You* snatches victory from the jaws of potential defeat, but the rest of the early 80s marks the band's nadir. *Undercover* and *Dirty Work* find an estranged Jagger and Richards dialling in performances of songs that add nothing to the Stones' legacy.

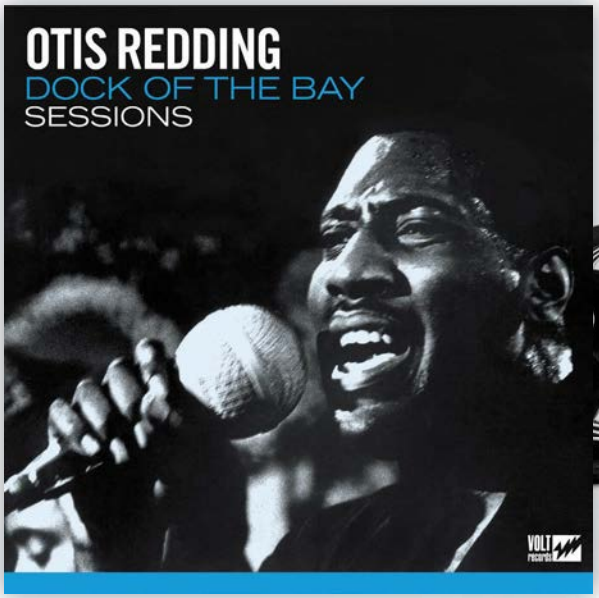
The double whammy of *Steel Wheels* and *Voodoo Lounge* sees them revitalised once again, though, as if the band finally realised just how far they'd sunk. But you may struggle to find anything memorable on *Bridges To Babylon*, which tries too hard to be trendy.

A Bigger Bang finds Jagger's reportage lyric writing partly reinvigorated, and the band sound sprightly on the blues covers LP *Blue & Lonesome*.

At nigh-on £400 for this box, though, you may be better served by choosing half-a-dozen of the superior albums to savour. *Steve Harnell*

VERDICT

7/10



Otis Redding

DOCK OF THE BAY SESSIONS

RHINO/VOLT RECORDS

Otis Redding could do it all – from ripping up R&B scorchers to breaking our hearts with a tear-stained ballad. It's all here in microcosm across these 12 tracks, which serve as a celebration of an artist at the peak of his powers and a moving reminder of the man we lost. *Dock Of The Bay Sessions* represents Redding's last forays into the recording studio before his tragic death in December 1967. You may be familiar with the majority of the tracklisting from posthumous releases in the three years following his passing, but this is the first time these songs have been presented in a coherent fashion that could well have formed the follow-up to his duets LP with Carla Thomas, *King & Queen*. The (near) title track that became Redding's most famous hit has its own side order of poignancy; big hits *Hard To Handle* and *Love Man* remain prime cuts of funky soul; while lesser-celebrated tracks, including the pleading *Direct Me* and plaintive *I've Got Dreams To Remember* maintain the high quality. The sheer exuberance of his unrestrained performance on *I'm A Changed Man* is an absolute joy, too. Redding's star shines brightly throughout, but equally impressive is the economical guitar style of Steve Cropper and the stellar Stax backing band. Essential stuff. *Steve Harnell*

VERDICT

8/10

Black Sabbath

SUPERSONIC YEARS – THE SEVENTIES SINGLES BOX SET

BMG

Like Led Zeppelin, Sabbath were at the vanguard of 70s rock bands who considered themselves a cut above the instant hit of pleasure gained from a 7" single. Occasional appearances on *Top Of The Pops* were just a distraction for Birmingham's heaviest; yet they knocked out their fair share of economical, radio-friendly classics, and this limited-edition boxset does a great job of presenting the highlights. For Sabbath completists, there are five rare single edits included – *Iron Man*, *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*, *Am I Going Insane (Radio)*, *Hard Road* and *Symptom Of The Universe*. The punchy remastering job here by Adam Pearce gives equal prominence to the underrated performances of bassist Geezer Butler and drummer Bill Ward, affording them parity with guitar behemoth Tony Iommi. The obvious heavy-rock touchstones of *Paranoid*, *Iron Man* and *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* are all present and correct – but it's the band's versatility that impresses most. Iommi is imperious on *The Wizard*, and the protest sludge rock of *Electric Funeral* still has the power to send a shiver down the spine. The acoustic interlude *Laguna Sunrise* shines much-needed light in amongst the doom and makes abundantly clear Sabbath had more strings to their bow than juggernaut riffs and Ozzy's gonzo charm. *Wyndham Wallace*

VERDICT

7/10

Simon And Garfunkel

GREATEST HITS

SONY LEGACY

Completists will have been sated four years ago by Sony's 6LP *The Complete Albums Collection*, which included this *Greatest Hits* as well as the duo's five Columbia albums and the legendary Central Park live show. That set's £135 price tag was too lofty for many, though, and this latest reissue of a stunning best-of package that sold 14 million copies in the US represents a more-than-adequate primer for any curious souls who don't already own it. It seems churlish to single out individual cuts from this stellar collection: *Mrs Robinson* from *The Graduate* soundtrack and 1968's *Bookends;* the absolute perfection of *The Boxer*'s plaintive response to Simon's critics, famously taking 100 hours of studio time to record; and their pair of Billboard No. 1s – the exquisite pop-gospel *Bridge Over Troubled Water* and the haunting, chiming guitar of *The Sound Of Silence*. The latter spent 14 weeks at No. 1 after being remixed by producer Tom Wilson – a transformative moment in the career of one of pop's most important duos. *Gary Walker*

VERDICT

9/10

Carole King

HER GREATEST HITS: SONGS OF LONG AGO

SONY LEGACY

First released in 1978 and remastered in 1999, King's first best-of compilation rounds up material from *Tapestry*, *Music*, *Rhymes & Reasons*, *Fantasy*, *Wrap Around Joy* and *Thoroughbred*. With the benefit of hindsight, 12 tracks seems a scant tribute to such a prolific and gifted songwriter. Only four songs from career-highlight *Tapestry* make the cut, and none from debut *Writer* or the two albums closest to its release – *Simple Things* and *Welcome Home*. Inevitably, it's three of the songs from *Tapestry* that stand out: the yearning examination of growing distance in a relationship, *So Far Away*; the raunchy *I Feel The Earth Move* and the raw break-up story *It's Too Late*. *Smackwater Jack*, the upbeat odd-one-out on the album, is a surprising inclusion, alongside the brassy Latin shuffle and Spanish lyrics of *Corazon* from 1973's *Fantasy*. The two live tracks included on previous versions are omitted here, and there's no place for *You've Got A Friend*, but it's a brief yet perfect showcase of King's honest vocal talent and songwriting brilliance. *Gary Walker*

VERDICT

8/10

Calvin Harris

I CREATED DISCO/ READY FOR THE WEEKEND

SONY

Remember the days when Calvin Harris was a DIY dance hero, rather than a global superstar DJ and boyfriend accessory to Taylor Swift? In light of his now-ubiquitous position as a worldwide EDM titan, his modest and extremely enjoyable debut is ripe for revisiting. There's a clear nod to Mylo's *Destroy Rock & Roll* on *The Girls*, amid a record packed with hook-laden tunes including *Merrymaking At My Place*, and *Acceptable In The 80s*. It's a little front-loaded, but the seeds of a hitmaker were already sown. By second album *Ready For The Weekend*, the rough edges were smoothed off and replaced with precision-tooled dance pop. There's a broadened sonic palette on *The Rain,* and the title track shows a new crowdpleasing awareness for bigger stages... By the time you reach *I'm Not Alone*, you sense that the enormodome gigs were an inevitability. *Steve Harnell*

VERDICT

7/10

David Sylvian & Holger Czukay

PLIGHT & PREMONITION/ FLUX & MUTABILITY

GRÖNLAND

In his liner notes to 1975's *Discreet Music*, Brian Eno wrote of recuperating after an accident, listening to an album of harp music played so quietly it "presented a new way of hearing music: as part of the ambience of the environment". These two collaborations between Japan mastermind Sylvian and Can's inspirational Czukay took that further, deliberately adding apparently 'external' ambient sounds to their ethereal soundscapes. Drifting, almost New Age, synths were enhanced on *Plight* by distant, chiming bells and faint radio static, and on the blissful *Premonition* by undulating pianos, muted disembodied brass, and quietly insistent Morse code beeps. Discerning what was real and what was sampled added to the 1988 album's haunting appeal, and, emboldened by a Top 75 placing, they returned a year later, with *Flux*'s Middle Eastern twist on the echoing warmth heard in the second half of Sylvian's *Gone To Earth* (1986), and *Mutability*'s almost suffocatingly affecting melancholy.
Wyndham Wallace

VERDICT

9/10

Mansun

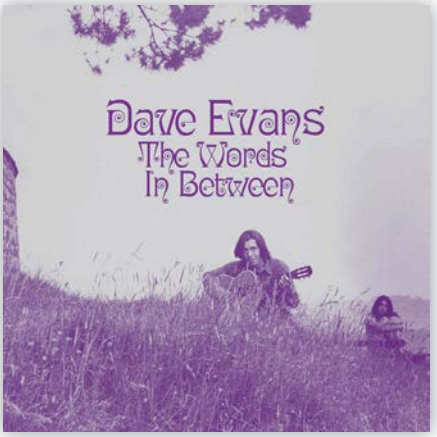
ATTACK OF THE GREY LANTERN

KSCOPE

Back in the 90s, tracks such as *Wide Open Space*, *Taxloss* and *She Makes My Nose Bleed* were 'indie floor-fillers', and Mansun's debut was stuffed with them. Deservedly, it spent almost half a year in the charts, eventually reaching No. 1. Not bad for a record which frontman Paul Draper referred to as "half a concept album" and which contains such unpromising titles as *Dark Mavis*, *Stripper Vicar* and *The Chad Who Loved Me*. What made it so successful – and why it still works – is Draper's Beatles-esque way with a melody. After frequent hesitant starts, each song eventually emerges with at least one killer hook that you can't shake. Kscope's vinyl remaster is timely, too, as 1997 copies will set you back £70-plus. It's a shame that the original's inner-gatefold artwork and poster have not been reproduced but, hey, one listen to *Attack*... and any residual sour taste from Draper's Nottingham meltdown of earlier this year will be banished forever.
Ben Wardle

VERDICT

8/10



Dave Evans

THE WORDS IN BETWEEN

EARTH RECORDINGS

Dave Evans here joins a growing legion of 60s and 70s British folk musicians rescued from obscurity that counts Anne Briggs, Clive Palmer, Vashti Bunyan and more among its number. Evans fits into this reluctant crew somewhere between Bert Jansch at his most bucolic and Mark Fry's affably meandering acid-folk – and yet, despite adhering to the typically austere accompaniment of the era, he still manages to sound unlike anyone else. On this reissued 1971 album of singer-songwriter fare, Evans' sunny fingerpicking, which became more vigorous in later years, displays a supreme gift for melody and unique twists and turns. His songs, meanwhile, are sun-baked city narratives about Bristol and beyond, sung in a delicious Welsh lilt as comforting as an eiderdown-covered hay bale. This is yet another essential excavation from the superior Earth Recordings.
Chris Parkin

VERDICT

8/10

LONG LIVE VINYL CHOICE

Wire

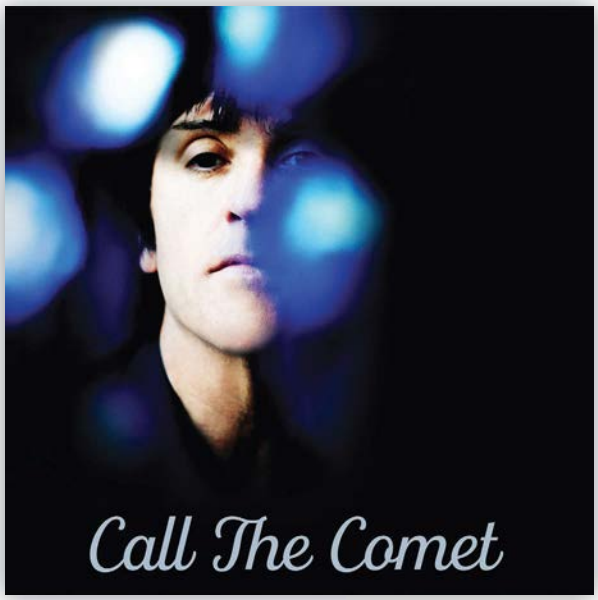
PINK FLAG/CHAIRS MISSING/154

PINK FLAG

One of the greatest opening salvos of any band, Wire's first three albums are all essential slabs of vinyl, and chart the legendary band's development from sneering art-school punks to heroic post-punk pioneers. Hitting the racks in 1977, *Pink Flag*'s 21 songs spanned a mere 35.37. Yet this was no Ramones-style 1-2-3-4-athon, and its deconstructed punk was served up with an abrasive intelligence matched with invention and irony. Its impact spread far and wide, with *Strange* later covered by R.E.M. and *Three Girl Rhumba* a costly influence on Elastica. *Chairs Missing* arrived in 1978, and while a small semblance of punk remained, the band's loftier ambitions provoked arty experimentation. The oblique pop of the album's two singles, the dissonant *I Am The Fly* and the fragile *Outdoor Miner*, demonstrated how far they'd come. Named after the number of gigs the band had played in their career at the time of the album's release, the post-punk threshold was fully crossed with *154*, issued in 1979. The band now fully embraced the abstract and, instead of song fragments, Newman, Gilbert, Lewis and Gotobed were creating fully realised, complex soundscapes. *Gary Tipp*

VERDICT

9/10



Johnny Marr

CALL THE COMET

NEW VOODOO/WARNER

The bad news first: this successor to 2014's *Playland* at times lacks deeper lyrical substance; but we turn to Johnny Marr for music, not enlightenment, and fortunately, *Call The Comet*'s greatest pleasure is in how – with his flamboyant former bandmate wrapping The Smiths' legacy like soggy chips in right-wing tabloids – Marr seems driven to reclaim their musical past before it's irreversibly soiled. Consequently, nostalgic flourishes – the *Queen Is Dead* ferocity of *The Tracers* and *Actor Attractor*'s distant echoes of *How Soon Is Now* – dominate this absorbing collection. Indeed, at times, as on *Hi Hello* – which is not only brim-full of the jangling guitars that made Marr a hero, but also finds him whooping and moaning like the arch-miserablist himself – it almost feels like revenge. But *Call The Comet* never depends upon reminders of history. It merely utilises, then transcends them, as proven by the unexpectedly playful, anthemic *Bug*, or *Walk Into The Sea*, its naked piano chords and trebly guitar melody swelling into a howling wall of guitars; Marr's lyrics – eloquently poetic – are recited like he's The Blue Aeroplanes' Gerard Langley.
Morrissey may be trying to murder The Smiths' reputation, but Marr hasn't sounded this alive in years.
Wyndham Wallace

VERDICT

8/10

Jim James
UNIFORM DISTORTION
ATO RECORDS

Jim James turns the political concerns of 2016's *Eternally Even* to societal ones here – *Uniform Distortion* is influenced by his worries that technology has robbed us of our humanity. But far from being brow-furrowingly serious, this is often a whole heap of fun. Opener *Just A Fool* rumbles in with a squalling Jack White-style bluesy guitar riff and a knowing shrug of the shoulders at life's troubles. The punsome *You Get To Rome* is a rollicking glam stomper, and there's a melodic nod to *Dreams* on the Fleetwood Mac-esque *No Secrets*, which also boasts a cavernous solo Neil Young would be proud of... *All In Your Head* boasts a similarly Crazy Horse-style rumble. James tries on punkish power-pop for size to great effect on *Yes To Everything,* and the perky *Better Late Than Never* is a two-minute breezy delight. Far from being pained, mostly, James sounds uniformly chipper. *Steve Harnell*

Danny Goffey
SCHTICK
DISTILLER RECORDS

While Gaz Coombes turns to increasingly mature endeavours, his former Supergrass bandmate appears not to have noticed their old band's dissolution, instead flaunting the same youthful energy with which they recorded 1995's *I Should Coco*. *Schtick* – despite sometimes sounding like Norway's Datarock, presumably a symptom of shared adolescent passions – apparently takes *Teenage Kicks* as inspiration, then adds further nostalgic spice: a hint of Queen in the thumping *Buzzkiller*, an arch nod to *Fashion*-era Bowie on *Let It Happen* and *Cosmic Bob* – which, like *Sick Holiday* (a *Viz*-like portrait of easyJet-setters) also points to Madness – and some Buzzcocks in *I Can't Leave It Alone* and the spiky *Television*. Add some Gang Of Four dub on *I Am Done (With Trying To Be Young)* – you could've fooled us! – and you could call this a teenage fanclub. Maybe, though, the days when one threw around juvenile titles such as *Psychomental* might be better left behind. *Wyndham Wallace*

Geniuser
I AM
OHAH RECORDS

That Geniuser's previous releases have slipped under the radar seems in keeping with Michael Allen's career to date: as leader of The Wolfgang Press, 4AD's 1980s punk-funk pioneers, he was revered, yet rarely rewarded. This collaboration with Italian painter and producer Giuseppe De Bellis deserves better, though for some, its choking claustrophobia may be too distressing. Oozing malevolence, *I Am*'s dark grooves are viciously unsettling, not least on the ugly grind of *Man Of Sand* – which also nods cheekily to Can – and on *Monkey*, in which heavy dub underpins washes of evil effects and Allen's barbed, malicious lyrics. *Is It Me?*, too, builds up an increasingly paranoid head of steam, and even the sluggish *Epiphany* bleeds a bitter spite. By the pallid *A Thousand Sorrows*, however, Allen sounds burned out and morose, while *Find You* finds him frankly desperate. A perfect record, one might say therefore, for acutely imperfect times. *Wyndham Wallace*

VERDICT
8/10

VERDICT
7/10

VERDICT
8/10

REVIEWS

Morcheeba

BLAZE AWAY

FLY AGARIC RECORDS

"It's Morcheeba!" a voice announces as the title track of the London duo's ninth album begins, stating the obvious in a fashion that will no doubt provoke sniggers from cynics. That the voice belongs to Roots Manuva, though, should silence any doubters, especially when he adds: "We are together! In unity!" Despite Roots' reintroduction of the hip-hop influences sidelined in Skye|Ross, *Blaze Away* remains largely true to Morcheeba's laid-back roots: *Never Undo*'s slick, bass-heavy groove deliciously showcases Skye Edwards' honeyed voice, as does *Sweet L.A.*, where she's accompanied only by Rhodes piano, while *Love Dub* confirms that they do indeed. Musical mastermind Paul Godfrey also verifies his chops with ingeniously understated slide guitar on *Find Another Way*, while French star Benjamin Biolay brings additional sophistication to *Paris Sur Mer*, and Lambchop's Kurt Wagner provides lyrics for the nimble *It's Summertime*. They're hardly 'blazing' here, but Morcheeba still smoulder admirably.

Wyndham Wallace

VERDICT

8/10

Richard Hawley & Ollie Trevers

FUNNY COW OST

LAUGHING GIRL

It's hard to mix music and comedy. Fortunately, while Richard Hawley may possess a fine sense of humour – as attendees of his shows will confirm – he aims exclusively for the heart on this soundtrack to Adrian Shergold's well-received film. Given his tender croon and willingness to take things slow, it'll come as no surprise he strikes his target repeatedly: Hawley's a man who can imbue even a potentially dubious endearment like 'funny cow' with the requisite affection. The title track, with its trembling opening guitar chords further underlined by quietly fluttering strings, is typical of the album's tone, and Hawley's matched perfectly with Corinne Bailey Rae on *I Still Want You*, while the instrumental *Leaving Mikes House* boasts the warmth of a 1970s Hovis ad. Contributions from newcomer Ollie Trevers, who sounds like Midge Ure on *From Then Til Now*, are slightly less seductive, but overall, this is lovely stuff. No joke.

Wyndham Wallace

VERDICT

7/10

Jenny Hval

THE LONG SLEEP

SACRED BONES

Following on from 2016's *Blood Bitch*, the Norwegian artist Jenny Hval returns with an EP (although at 23 minutes, it's not far off album-length) that carries on blurring the lines between esoteric pop and avant-garde explorations. The opening *Spells* is infectious in its piano-led twinkling melodies, almost recalling peak-period Mercury Rev in its subtle yet immersive atmosphere. Hval's vocals soar above gliding saxophone and a gentle-yet-propulsive electronic beat. It's a beautiful construct, and a pristine example of Hval's ability to craft pop from seemingly nowhere – or at least within unconventional song structures. The surging, vocally soaring opening track feels like something of a distant memory by the time *The Long Sleep* is reached. Based around an 11-minute drone, Hval's vocals disappear into the background like distant echoes as rumbling, pummelling electronics move the song along. The polar opposition of these two tracks alone is a beautiful embodiment of the vastness of talent Hval possesses.

Daniel Dylan Wray

VERDICT

8/10

Let's Eat Grandma

I'M ALL EARS

TRANSGRESSIVE

Rosa Walton and Jenny Hollingworth – aka Let's Eat Grandma – are now entering the twilight of their adolescence. Two years after their debut *I, Gemini*, which they released when they were 17, the British singers and multi-instrumentalists are back with *I'm All Ears*. For this second offering, they take all the ingredients of their debut – furious synth-pop, loops, a love of PC Music and vintage synths, daring experimentation, intimacy and an unsettling chill – and inflate them with grandeur into what might be one of the most impressive records of the year so far. Thematically, *I'm All Ears* is far more open, inclusive and honest than its predecessor, describing Walton and Hollingworth's life over the past two years and navigating topics of friendships, romantic relationships and mental health. Where *I, Gemini* played on the pair's twin-like and child-like qualities, this presents them as two distinct voices – artists and women who are developing into one of the most exciting acts in the country. *Sam Willis*

VERDICT

8/10

Wooden Shjips

V.

THRILL JOCKEY

This is album number five for Moon Duo founder Ripley Johnson's other fuzz-guitar-strafed hypno-rock wanderers and, generally speaking, it's business as usual. Over a decade in, and the band continue to refract their looping classic-rock jams, reminiscent of Endless Boogie and their ilk, through the trippy and wonkily askew lens of acid-droners Spacemen 3. In short, this is Manna for attendees of the sudden abundance of 'psych' festivals taking place all over Europe and the US these days. But the heads-down stoner drive of yore has, certainly on the San Francisco and Portland band's most recent records, taken on a lighter, groovier touch. Now their nimble wig-outs are accompanied by euphoric sax squalls and synapse-frying trickery, as they tap into their West Coast DNA for a record of sun-dazed, liquid-light psychedelia that's at odds with the pessimism of these times. It's time to drink the orange sunshine. *Chris Parkin*

VERDICT

7/10

LONG LIVE VINYL CHOICE

Kamasi Washington

HEAVEN AND EARTH

YOUNG TURKS

After 2015's epic *The Epic*, Kamasi Washington has decided to release just a double LP on this occasion, instead of a triple, while also squeezing in a superb EP in 2017's *Harmony Of Difference*. Washington is clearly locked into a momentous groove at present, which he continues to ride out with grace into this two-part album. The opening *Fists Of Fury* sets the tone for a record that is as alive, spontaneous, spunky and innovative as it is restrained, suave and glistening. Washington's blend of jazz, led by his endlessly engulfing saxophone, is a blend of the sugary and the experimental. He constantly displays the ability to switch the mood between velvet-smooth and head-crackingly atonal, but he usually resides somewhere in the middle, forging out a continually unpredictable path. Drums spark and spit restlessly around him and basslines dance joyously throughout – it's a musical gift that keeps on giving until its dying moments. *Daniel Dylan Wray*

VERDICT

9/10

Dance Gavin Dance

ARTIFICIAL SELECTION

RISE RECORDS

Hot on the heels of 2016's much-loved *Mothership*, Dance Gavin Dance's eighth album wastes no time in stating its intent: to surpass. Though still imbued with insane technical flourishes, guttural vocals and infectious hooks, this record displays a maturity we've not heard before. Where *Mothership* was unadulterated, *Artificial Selection* is considered; still drenched in bombastic aplomb, but eager to break convention – *Count Bassy* positively purrs, while *Shelf Life*'s ethereal haze is a DGD you never knew you needed. And even when the record stumbles on the slightly disjointed tonal shifts of *Midnight Crusade*, *Flash* and *Story Of My Bros*, the blistering final half more than atones. This is quintessential Dance Gavin Dance. Outrageously catchy, brutally unhinged and unforgettably audacious, *Artificial Selection*'s masterful fusion of styles further cements the Sacramento five-piece as powerhouses of the scene. We can't wait to see what they do next. *Chris Mackin*

VERDICT

9/10

Oneohtrix Point Never

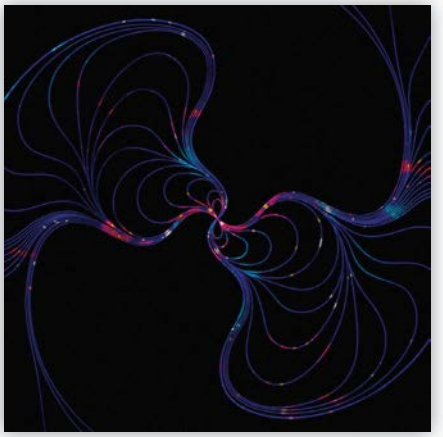
AGE OF

WARP

Eclecticism has long been at the root of Daniel Lopatin's OPN project. The bricolage essence of the 'vaporwave' genre he became synonymous with is based on edit-based manipulations such as 'chop and screw', used to create something new, often out of pre-existing material. What has given Lopatin longevity, however (including a great score for the 2017 Robert Pattinson-starring *Good Time*) is his ability to supersede technique and transmute the practice into something new altogether: something personal. This is still twisted, warbled, jagged electronics spliced with sci-fi-influenced ambience, but he shifts things from the moving *Black Snow* to the terrifying *Warning* in a way that feels deeply planted in narrative, despite its head-spinning and varied traverse through genres, tones, paces and textures. From eerie synthesiser lines to throbbing industrial beats, *Age Of* rarely sits still for a moment, but remains an engrossing, challenging, yet rewarding listen. *Daniel Dylan Wray*

VERDICT

8/10



The Orb

NO SOUNDS ARE OUT OF BOUNDS

COOKING VINYL

Little by The Orb is concise, but the ambient techno of 2015's *Moonbuilding 2703 AD* and 2016's *COW*, welcomed as a return to their strengths, was certainly less meandering than normal. Talk of a rebirth, however, was wishful thinking. Luckily, *No Sounds...*, which combines idiosyncratic, stoned grooves with the pop mindset that brought early success, provides greater justification for such sentiments. *Other Blue Worlds* harks back to 1992's *Blue Room*, and *Little Fluffy Clouds* is recalled in the echoing voices of *Wish I Had A Pretty Dog*. Similarly enjoyable are the downbeat, Air-like *Doughnuts Forever*, *Rush Hill Road*'s celebratory reggae – as poppy, thanks to Hollie Cook's guest vocals, as anything they've ever done – and *Wolfbane*, which merges airhorns, anti-war sentiments, and Youth's double bass. *Easy On The Onions*, meanwhile, is even tastier, with Jah Wobble's hypnotic bassline slowly dissolving into a pool of Roger Eno's reflective pianos. Don't fear the reefer. *Wyndham Wallace*

VERDICT

8/10

Genre Hopping

Present-day jazz

Chris Parkin delves into the contemporary-jazz scene and finds the genre being morphed by forward-thinking and intensely creative sounds springing up across the globe…

It's rare that present-day jazz gets any attention beyond the usual jazzosphere. Just ask Scandinavia's Mats Gustafsson and Nils Petter Molvær. They've been making the most forward-thinking jazz music around, for well over a decade, to mainstream indifference. But when Kendrick Lamar introduced Thundercat and Kamasi Washington to the world on 2015's *To Pimp A Butterfly*, knitting their exploratory sounds into something palatable for wider audiences, music fans turned genre-fluid almost overnight.

Cue an avalanche of jazz reissues, hype for Washington's latest album *Heaven And Earth*, and fêted young jazz scenes the world over. The London movement, which operates collaboratively, as one, like a musical Gaia theory, is right at the heart of this reawakening. Showcasing this close-knit scene is a compilation from Gilles Peterson's Brownswood label.

We Out Here is a double-LP primer featuring nine new tracks recorded in London over three days. Led by saxophonist and scene linchpin Shabaka Hutchings and featuring the spiritual-leaning sounds of Maisha, Nubya Garcia's ecstatic improv and the Ezra Collective's hypnotic Afrobeat jazz, these musicians remain oblivious to passing trends as they go about sculpting their own sound of the future.

Your next step should be the thrilling third album, *Your Queen Is A Reptile*, by Hutchings' Sons Of Kemet – an intense throw-down of feverish, freewheeling Afro-jazz driven by a twin-drum attack and Theon Cross's muscular tuba play. Each song pays jubilant, yet plaintive tribute to Hutchings' queens of black history, including former Black Panther Angela Davis and campaigner Doreen Lawrence. It's currently awaiting a re-press after special 180g copies flew out of the racks, so keep your eyes peeled. Hutchings, of course, also helms the fearsome cosmic-jazz skronkers The Comet Is Coming.

> IT'S ALL ABOUT THE INCREDIBLE *DOWNTOWN CASTLES CAN NEVER BLOCK THE SUN* BY BEN LAMAR GAY, OUT ON LIMITED-EDITION 'FROZEN CONCORD GRAPE' VINYL

Last year was a big one for Chicago's jazz-focused International Anthem label, too. In 2017, they ran the stylistic gamut: from Tortoise guitarist Jeff Parker's thick-as-molasses guitar experiments on the heat-baked *The New Breed* to Chicago improv trumpeter Jaimie Branch's sunshine-and-doom free-jazz opus *Fly Or Die* and the politicised rage of Irreversible Entanglements. This year, it's all about the incredible *Downtown Castles Can Never Block The Sun* by Brazil-based, Chicago-born Ben LaMar Gay, out now on limited-edition 'Frozen Concord Grape' vinyl. Uncategorisably brilliant, it sounds like dark and brooding, 70s-era Miles Davis filtered through a 21st-century Captain Beefheart with a penchant for Warp Records. Underpinned by fury and modern experimentation, the Chicago scene is perhaps the most thrilling prospect in jazz today.

Occupying a different headspace are New York's Onyx Collective, who serve up something more along the lines of Sun Ra Arkestra and Art Ensemble Of Chicago at their most impromptu. Saxophonist Isaiah Barr, who appears on the latest David Byrne album, leads a core five-piece, plus guests such as Princess Nokia and Dev Hynes, through raw and ominous flights of improv on their wonderful new album, *Lower East Suite Part Three*, released by Big Dada. ●

HOW TO BUY TURNTABLE UPGRADES

Want to make more of your turntable? **Paul Rigby** looks at a number of ways you can do just that...

When manufacturers build a turntable, they will do it to a budget. So, for example, the CEO of that respected company HIFI X might say: "Okay, guys, I want to sell a brand-new turntable – called the Deck X. I want it ready to hit the market in September for the Christmas market and I want it to sell at £500. Not a penny more."

So there are your limits, in both time and cash. This means, as a developer, you're restricted by both resources (there are only so many people and only so many hours in the day), and also your budget.

From that skilled workforce, what you get is most probably a very wonderful Deck X that's a dream to use but, nevertheless, a compromise based on those elements. This also means that there might be certain parts – eminently replaceable parts – that can be changed to enhance and improve the sound quality. These parts would have more than likely pushed

Image Pro-Ject Primary turntable. www.project-audio.com

the manufacturer's original budget over the edge, but you don't care about that, do you? You just want a nicer-sounding turntable.

More than this, there might be parts out there that will work well with Deck X that have been developed – by third-party companies and skilled tinkerers – since Deck X's release. There might also be parts out there that were never meant to be used with Deck X, but someone had a spare hour to mess about with on a Sunday, matched them together and, would you believe it… and so it goes.

OFF THE SHELF

Some turntable upgrades are decidedly non-specific. These are items that have been developed independently for the hi-fi market and are intended to be used anywhere and everywhere, without any particular target market or niche product in mind.

For example, there are plenty of specialist cartridge manufacturers out there who produce a host of models for many price points, from Audio-Technica and Goldring to Ortofon and Koetsu. There's a lot of choice.

The same can be said for producers of platter mats. These things arrive in a wide variety of materials. Anything from metal to felt and from rubber to cork. Again, the choice is vast – but there's more to consider… everything from clamps to stabilisers to belts. The third-party, ready-to-buy and ready-to-use accessory market covers items as prosaic as a new headshell to something as exotic as a new type of oil for the platter bearing.

HOME BASE

Of course, turntable manufacturers themselves are more than aware that upgrades, down the line, can often improve and enhance the quality of their turntables. Some brands therefore produce kits or enhancements of their own, to improve the sound of their own turntable models.

This practice is not too common, because the money and the profit is in the actual turntable production and not in the supporting accessories. Besides, the brand might not have the capacity to make its own accessories. Nevertheless, you will find branded accessories out there, and they are always worth a look.

THE THIRD WAY

Third-party outfits often produce turntable-specific upgrades. That is, they will create one or more accessories that have been developed and bagged for sale, and can be used only with a specific turntable design and no other.

Hence, they might say: "Okay, here's a suite of four replacement feet that we have made for Deck X and only Deck X, so don't bother fitting them to any other turntable because they won't fit or they will be sonic mismatch, etc". That kind of thing.

When it comes to upgrades of this nature, you might notice a difference. That is, they can be quite ambitious in their goals and targets. So, instead of a platter mat, they might involve replacing the platter itself. Instead of the head shell, they might offer a new arm. Instead of a new set of feet, they might change part of the actual plinth. Upgrades of this type can be large and meaty in approach, but they

There's a staggering range of turntable-component upgrades out there for you to consider

THERE'S A LOT TO CONSIDER: EVERYTHING FROM CLAMPS TO STABILISERS TO BELTS. THE THIRD-PARTY, READY-TO-BUY AND READY-TO-USE ACCESSORY MARKET COVERS ITEMS AS PROSAIC AS A NEW HEADSHELL TO SOMETHING AS EXOTIC AS A NEW TYPE OF OIL FOR THE PLATTER BEARING

Take a look at the upgrades we've singled out below and consider which areas of your own system could be improved

often insist on retaining the crucial personality and sound signature of the original that they modify. Otherwise, you might as well just invest in a new turntable.

READY AND WAITING

The final type of upgrade is the plug-and-play variant, which is when a third-party company has taken the skeleton of a popular turntable design and added a new arm, platter and cartridge… and maybe new feet and possibly a new platter mat. But this souped-up new version is presented to the user as a ready-to-use item, with no call on the customer to reach for the screwdriver.

UNFORCED ERRORS

Sometimes, the reason for upgrading a turntable can play a massive part in the choice and implementation of the new part. For example, you might buy a new turntable because it offers great bass but the upper midrange is not the best. You knew this at the time of purchase, but bass was your priority then and so out came the wallet. Since that time, the upper-midrange problem has begun to get on your nerves. But help is at hand, because another skilled technical user has also reached the end of their tether and developed a new set of isolating feet for their product, because that was the design 'fault' to begin with. New feet installed, all is well and harmonious.

Hence, in this case, the upgrade is not there to enhance the sound or to make a great sound even finer, but to actually fix a design problem.

Image Elipson 100 turntable. www.elipson.com

TURNTABLE UPGRADES: BUYER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

What turntable upgrades should you buy? Here's a selection of three different types, at varying price points. These are just our recommended choices. There are lots of others that I have not been able to include due to space reasons. Why not contact us and tell us about your favourites, so that other readers can be made aware of them? We'd love to hear from you. ●

OFFICIAL SOURCES

Upgrades from the brand who made the original turntable in the first place

REGA
24V PERFORMANCE MOTOR UPGRADE KIT
PRICE £129
WWW.REGA.CO.UK
This new motor fits a range of designs from the RP1 and Planar 2 to the Planar 3 and Planar 25. The aim is to reduce noise vibrations: it enhances stability to improve sound quality.

AVID
NAIM SLIDE
PRICE £400
WWW.AVIDHIFI.COM
A great example of niche targeting from a host manufacturer. Aimed at users who want to use a Naim ARO tonearm with an Avid turntable, this enhances sound quality because, for the first time, it allows overhang adjustments to be made during installation.

NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE
HEAVY UPGRADE KIT
PRICE £550
NOTTINGHAMANALOGUESTUDIO.CO.UK
Aimed at the Spacedeck, Ace Spacedeck and Space 294 turntables, this upgrade kit has an inch-thick graphite pad, which makes up for the top mat. It also comes with the spacers needed to raise the arm height and rotating mass, and the upgrades are said to help improve both stability and resonance control.

GENERAL UPGRADES

Useful upgrades that will work across a broad range of designs

CARTRIDGES

PRICE £VARIOUS

EU.AUDIO-TECHNICA.COM

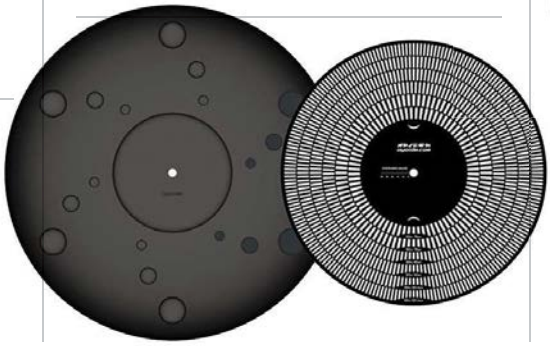
Most turntables offer extra capacity in terms of cartridges. Hence, the majority of bundled cartridges can successfully be replaced. Swap the Lenco L-3808's example with £35-worth of Audio-Technica AT95E for good times and extra sonic detail, for instance.

PLATTER MATS

PRICE £VARIOUS

WWW.BLACKRHODIUM.CO.UK

Sometimes, turntable platters can ring like a bell, causing stridency and brightness in the midrange. A top-quality mat can calm these stormy waters. The superb Oyaide BR-12 at £85, for example, features vibration-calming Butyl rubber.



HEADSHELLS

PRICE £VARIOUS

AMMONITE-AUDIO.CO.UK

Your cartridge is the most delicate and sensitive measuring device in your entire hi-fi. It can pick up and transmit the tiniest of vibrations: good or bad. The Acoustical Systems arché 5D headshell (£475) not only displays excellent build quality, but you can adjust the cartridge's rake angle to boot.

THIRD-PARTY UPGRADES

Bespoke upgrades from independent manufacturers

ORIGIN LIVE TONEARMS MODS

PRICE £77

ORIGINLIVE.COM

Improvements from these mods – which Origin Live perform for you – are wide ranging, but they include a complete rewiring of the tonearm, structural modifications and counterweight replacement. None of the mods are too expensive and all slot in at under £100 each. The end result is a notable enhancement in overall sound quality.

WTP SERENE PROJECT FOR LINN SONDEK LP12

PRICE £264

STACKAUDIO.CO.UK

The Serene Project comprises six components, all of which have been designed to improve the performance of the part they replace while maintaining compatibility with the original components. They include a plinth, top plate, cross brace, base, sub-plate and arm board. Each enhances overall performance.

TIMESTEP EVO

PRICE £2,995

TIMESTEP-DISTRIBUTION.CO.UK

This is an all-in-one, upgraded, installed and ready-to-go package. In the case? An original Technics SL-1210 with a new arm and cartridge, platter mat, arm-mounting plate, motor dynamics, power switch, feet, bearing and power supply. A Technics transformed!

DREAM MACHINES

JADIS THALIE TURNTABLE

£45,000 *www.absolutesounds.com*

In our series showcasing high-end hi-fi to die for, **Paul Rigby** encounters the Thalie turntable – a precision-tooled marvel with only four rotating mechanical parts…

Designed and built in France, this remarkable turntable is not only very heavy (it arrives at a hernia-inducing 80kg) but also rather gorgeous. The great thing about the Thalie is how little of the design actually moves. With a reassuringly solid granite pedestal providing the platform, there are only four rotating mechanical parts: the motor, the pulley, the tray on its axis and the bearing, and each of them is precision machined. This reduction in mechanical parts results in an attractive simplicity, speed stability, valuable reliability – and, Jadis claims, "perfect sound reproduction".

1 GET YOUR FREQ ON
Thanks to the synchronous motor, no electronic speed control is required. Control is completely mechanical and is regulated by the electrical network frequency, which helps stability

2 GRANITE SLAB
The turntable's pedestal is formed from granite – so there's 50kg right there, while the platter is 20kg

3 FINE TUNED
Parts machining is particularly fine in tolerance terms, being reduced to around one micron – the same dimensions as a vinyl record's grooves

3
2
Jadis

FUNK FIRM RAGE II

TURNTABLE UPGRADE KIT

F7 tonearm £425; three Bo!ng Feet (For Rega) £112; Achromat £70 *thefunkfirm.co.uk 07846 798367*

Happy with your Planar 3 turntable, but wouldn't mind giving your Rega a regal makeover? Well, send it to The Funk Firm and they'll do the upgrades for you. **Paul Rigby** pimps his ride…

A quick note before we get down to business – in essence, the items listed above combine to update a Rega Planar 3… although they could also be used to upgrade the likes of the Planar 2, 25, RP3, 5 and 6. You can ask The Funk Firm for an extended list of model options… But why on earth would you want to do that? Why would you want to spend a not-inconsiderable amount of cash on a turntable that serves only as an upgrade? Why not save up for a bigger and better model?

There are many reasons, actually. Firstly – and often, most importantly – there are many hi-fi users out there who fear moving from a familiar turntable to a more expensive, yet unknown, new model. What if the new turntable fails to live up to its initial promise? What if you don't have a dealer nearby and you have to buy from the internet, and you make a wrong decision? Then there's all the hassle of returning the thing. What if its sonic signature clashes with the rest of your system? We have enough going on in our lives to have hi-fi hassles getting in the way, too.

A second reason may be that you might like the sound of your turntable, but wish you had more of this and more of that: a bit of extension in the mids would be nice. Slightly more organic bass? That would sort you out, eh?

Then there's the price. The collective cash for these three items totals around £600, which is enough to… well, buy another Rega 3 plus a few LPs. So why not use that same money to (hopefully) enhance the sound quality of the deck you already have and take it to a new sonic level?

Let's run through the constituent parts of this kit (known as the Rage II). First up is the Achromat. A mat made of a

The Rage II upgrade features the ingeniously designed F7 tonearm

material that includes millions of stable bubbles, which direct harmful energy down the 'bubble path', converting them into heat and dissipation.

ARMED AND DANGEROUS

The arm is The Funk Firm's F7. Based on the advanced 'threaded' principle that hangs the arm and allows its tube to act like a seat on a swing, it offers plenty of sonic attributes and gives the Rega VTA and azimuth options for the first time.

Then there are the new Bo!ng feet, designed specifically for this turntable, which allow the plinth to sit on isolating springs. They arrive with custom-designed brackets that permit the use of the original Rega wood screws, in exactly the same original fitting positions – so no awkward drilling from the underside of the plinth is needed. They also feature low-density damping sponges to stop them bouncing all over the place like jelly.

I tried prog and vocal jazz during sound tests, using both Ortofon 2M Red and Benz Micro MC Gold cartridges.

The sound response does change (which is to be expected) – and for the better (which is not presumed). The Rage II creates an entirely new soundstage setup. Gone is the one-dimensional structure, replaced by a 3D affair with added subtlety and layering. A slight midrange stridency in the original is gone, replaced with a more focused, integrated mix offering a whole new air and space in the bass regions, enhancing their tonal qualities.

IF THE KIT FITS...

If you're interested in the upgrade, you can ship your own Rega to The Funk Firm and the kit can be fitted for £45 (including labour and return P&P), plus a service check and a new belt thrown in as a freebie. What you'll hear will be a new level of sound quality – one which will challenge new turntables priced at the resultant £1,150 or so (the rough price of the original deck and kit combined). This is a Rega Planar 3 transformed – morphed into a new and impressive-sounding beast... a beast on bouncy feet, that is. ●

VERDICT

PROS

ORGANIC BASS

HI-RES MIDRANGE

SOUNDSTAGE STRUCTURE

LOW NOISE

CONS

NOTHING

SCORE

30/33⅓

THE RAGE II UPGRADE CREATES AN ENTIRELY NEW SOUNDSTAGE SETUP. GONE IS THE ONE-DIMENSIONAL STRUCTURE, REPLACED BY A 3D AFFAIR

The new Bo!ng feet, designed for this turntable, enable the plinth to sit on isolated springs

EAT C-MAJOR SUPER PACK
TURNTABLE WITH ORTOFON CARTRIDGE

£1,998 *www.absolutesounds.com 0208 9713909*

Austrian turntable maker EAT offers a different variation on the C-Sharp model. **Paul Rigby** reviews this turntable-and-cartridge offering…

EAT is based in Austria and shares industrial space with the popular Pro-Ject turntable brand. That's because EAT boss Jozefina Lichtenegger is married to Pro-Ject's founder, Heinz Lichtenegger. That said, while all EAT turntable parts are made in the same industrial complex (which keeps costs down), EAT is a separate company with its own infrastructure, staff and designers.

This new turntable might look rather familiar. Basically, that's because the C-Major is a slightly stripped version of the popular C-Sharp turntable.

What does this mean in practical terms? You're offered a 9" tonearm instead of the C-Sharp's 10"; you won't see a separate speed control on the C-Major; and the latter's plinth is slightly smaller, as is the included clamp/stabiliser. It might be a stretch to call the Super Pack 'super' (or even a 'pack'), but it arrives with a very nice Ortofon MC Quintet Blue cartridge.

Let's get the clamp out of the way first, because it might cause confusion. You can use this accessory as a clamp, but it's not advised by the company (or us). Doing so will destabilise the midrange – use this item as a stabiliser only. The confusion is there, though, because the company insists on calling the stabiliser a clamp in its manual. Only place this item over the spindle loosely – do not tighten the upper screw to fix it as a clamp.

Turntable installation gets underway by screwing the three feet under the plinth. These are chunky and well made and feature squishy isolation material.

The Carbon/MDF plinth arrives as one part, but it consists of an inner and outer plinth, suspended by a firm TPE (thermo-plastic elastomers – more stable than Sorbothane, apparently) suspension sandwich floating-chassis system.

The C-Major turntable, complete with the Super Pack-supplied Ortofon MC Quintet Blue cartridge

THE EAT C-MAJOR TURNTABLE SPRINGS TO LIFE AND PERFORMS REMARKABLY WELL, PROVIDING AN ATTRACTIVE ENERGY AND A RANGE OF TEXTURAL DETAILS THAT DRAW YOU INTO THE MUSIC ITSELF

Note the giveaway carbon-fibre pattern within the inner plinth

The platter, featuring an aluminium/magnesium-alloy platter structure (inlaid with reconstituted vinyl to form an inlay that removes the need for a mat), sits on a bronze bearing. The whole thing is rotated via a belt-driven sub-platter by a proprietary AC motor and DC-driven AC generator for "speed stability" – all are fixed to the chassis. You change the belt on the pulley to alter speed from 33rpm to 45rpm and back again.

GLARING OMISSION

The C-Note tonearm is a hybrid Cardan/unipivot made from carbon fibre with copper internal cable. Azimuth and VTA are adjustable and a lightweight aluminium headshell is included. The anti-skating compensator uses a nylon thread and must be passed around the back of the housing to hook onto a small peg on its outer side. It's a fiddly job, but can be fitted if you remain patient.

General sound quality, testing a mixture of prog rock and vocal jazz, was good – with a full-throttle sound offering passion and energy but also, without the stabiliser, stridency in the midrange. This effect can be reduced using the EAT stabiliser, but a midrange glare remains.

This glare isn't horrendous. It isn't glass-shatteringly bright, but does grow irritating over time. The effect is reduced with a better-quality stabiliser (a HRS ADL), but even then, a slight glare persists.

I tried other stabilisers and three types of third-party feet and it was only when I fitted a MJ-12 metal platter mat from Oyaide that the glare reduced significantly. Adding the HRS stabiliser to the newly fitted mat basically solved the problem. Once 'fixed', the EAT has focus and precision and exhibits a more balanced mix. The overall sound presentation is pleasantly neutral, while the organisation of the soundstage feels more natural and relaxed.

MAJOR STYLE

This is a well-made stylish turntable, but it does have an issue with the platter, which suffers from an element of ringing. A top-quality mat and stabiliser will fix the problem, as described above, but you will obviously need to allocate more budget resources to get to that position.

Once you do sort out the issue, though, the EAT C-Major turntable springs to life and performs remarkably well, providing an attractive energy and a range of textural details that draw you into the music itself. ●

The sub-platter is rotated care of a proprietary motor

VERDICT

PROS

MIDRANGE TRANSPARENCY

SOUNDSTAGE STRUCTURE

TONALITY

BASS VITALITY

CONS

PLATTER

SCORE

25/33⅓

Q ACOUSTICS
3010i
BOOKSHELF SPEAKERS

£199 *www.qacoustics.co.uk*

John Pickford finds out whether Q Acoustics' attractive new bookshelf-format speakers punch above their weight…

Small is beautiful – so the saying goes – and it's certainly true of Q Acoustics' new 3010i bookshelf loudspeakers. The smallest model in the company's revised 3000 range, this speaker is actually slightly taller and 25% deeper than its predecessor. Our review samples sport a lovely graphite grey finish (black, white and walnut finishes are also available) and the cabinets' attractively rounded corners make a refreshing change from the multitude of four-square boxes out there. Magnet-attached grilles are provided; however, they are best removed for ultimate sound quality.

Internally braced to create a strong, acoustically inert cabinet, to improve structural integrity Q Acoustics dispenses with conventional panel cutouts for the speaker terminals. New low-profile binding posts aid close-to-wall positioning even when banana plugs, rather than spades or bare wires, are connected. Similar to many compact speakers, bass performance is improved by some reinforcement from a rear wall – though placing flush against the wall may necessitate the use of the foam bungs provided, to block the rear firing port.

A bass-reflex design, the 3010i's port assists the 100mm (four-inch) bass unit to achieve a low-frequency response of 65Hz, while the 22mm (0.9-inch) decoupled treble unit extends upwards to 30kHz. A stereo power amplifier rated 15 to 75 watts is recommended, though I would suggest 30w of solid-state power as a better starting point for unstressed performance at higher volume settings.

Placed on concrete-filled stands sited 30cm (12 inches) from the rear wall and powered by my ancient (1961) Leak Stereo 20 valve amplifier, I begin the audition with The Beatles' *Come Together* from a first pressing of *Abbey Road*. This track has a robust low end, and there are many subtleties in the mix, which many speakers fail to resolve. Although there isn't much in the way of deep bass from the 3010i, the bass guitar is nicely textured and well controlled; its low end integrates seamlessly with the mid and upper frequencies, no doubt due to the improvements made to the speakers' crossovers. John Lennon's "Shoot me" refrain at the start of the track often finds the second word obscured – however, the speakers reveal his voice distinctly from the backing track.

A MIDRANGE SUPREME

Acoustic jazz is also well presented. John Coltrane's phrasing on *A Love Supreme* is rendered convincingly, while the power of Elvin Jones' drums is portrayed remarkably well, considering the 3010i's size. Having enjoyed the speakers in my reference hi-fi system, I try them placed on my mantelpiece, flush to the wall, with the port bungs inserted. The bottom end becomes leaner; however, the overall balance of the broad midrange and upper frequencies stays even, with none of the tizzy treble that often plagues modern loudspeakers.

While dynamic expression is understandably limited due to size, the 3010is do sound bigger than they look, with impressive scale and fine soundstaging; stereo imaging is both panoramic and pinpoint-accurate. At their price point, these speakers offer excellent bang for buck, with a refined sound presentation and stylish looks. A superb introduction to high-fidelity sound for less money than some hi-fi nuts spend on a power cable. ●

VERDICT

PROS

- REFINED, UNHYPED SOUND
- EXCELLENT STEREO IMAGING
- STYLISH LOOKS
- SUPERB VALUE FOR MONEY

CONS

- NOT FOR BOOMBOX LOVERS

SCORE
30/33⅓

Part 3

VINTAGE TURNTABLE DIY PROJECT

Our Garrard 301 restoration reaches its conclusion as we complete the mechanical work – and make a vital decision about the plinth. **Huw Price** rumbles on…

Last time in our turntable restoration project, we cleaned up the cadmium-plated linkages, then refurbished the main bearing and the idler wheel bearings, but there's still some vital work to be done on the motor itself.

To gain access, the motor must be removed from the chassis – and the process begins with disconnecting the mains cable and desoldering the switch suppressor wires from the connection box on the side of the motor. The speed-change linkage also has to be disconnected from its control knob.

Six springs suspend the motor from a frame that is held to the chassis by three screws. With these removed, the frame detaches from the chassis. Each spring hooks onto a pin, which is secured by circlips. These circlips are removed, allowing the pins to be pushed out. Now the freed motor can be worked on.

By undoing two nuts on the bottom of the motor, the outer casing splits in half. Each half contains felt oil-retaining washers and sintered bushings for the motor spindle. To ensure correct running, these parts of the motor need lubricating, but only the top bushing is accessible without dismantling the motor. Even dismantled, access to the bottom bushing remains limited and the bottom metal plate must be removed by drilling out the rivets.

The felt washers are often stiff and non-absorbent. Ours is clean and soft, however – it's bone dry, because the motor hasn't seen fresh oil in decades. Since I bought replacements, I replace it anyway. The new felt is soaked in oil, and Perfect Sound's motor bearing refurb kit includes fresh rivets to reattach the metal plate. Some use screws instead, which makes future servicing easier; however, others prefer rivets, in order to maintain that coveted vintage-correct appearance.

It's easier to apply oil to the top bushing, because there are access holes in the motor casing. We've followed online recommendations to use 3-In-One SAE 20 Motor Oil. It copes better with heat than regular 3-In-One oil and is designed specifically for electric motors. Although we had to get it from a supplier in the USA, it was pretty cheap, even after P&P.

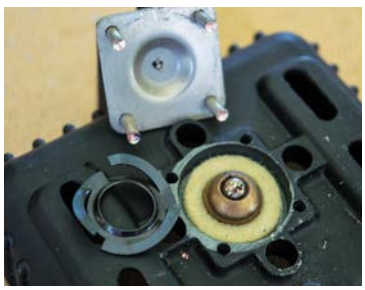
HIGHLY SPRUNG

Before starting this project, we bought a complete set of replacement springs. The motor-frame springs are different lengths, with the three shortest going at the upper part of the frame. Each one also has a rubber tube that slips over to prevent the springs from generating noise. Reassembly is the reverse of disassembly, but we undo the grub screws securing the speed disk and pulley from the motor shaft. Both are polished up and we take the opportunity to adjust the speed disk's height so it rotates freely without touching the brake. Score marks on a speed disk indicate that this adjustment is necessary.

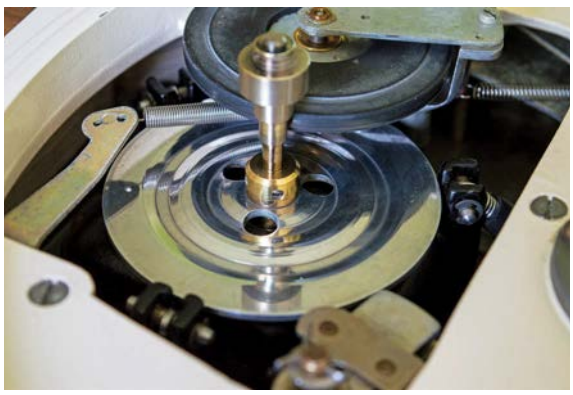
The motor now turns very freely and, when the platter is set spinning, it continues rotating for a few minutes before finally coming to a halt. With the 301 restoration complete, attention turns to mounting the turntable.

301 ON A PEDESTAL

We have already discussed the merits of belt-drive and idler-wheel turntables, and the strongly held views that divide vinyl lovers into two camps in the rarefied world of high-end hi-fi. And if you think that's esoteric, try doing some research into turntable plinths! Rightly or wrongly, direct-drive turntables such as our Garrard 301 acquired an unwanted reputation for generating mechanical noise that transmits to the tonearm, the cartridge and ultimately your speakers. Invariably, this manifests as low-frequency garbage that is commonly referred to as 'rumble'.



Four rivets holding the metal cover plate to the bottom of the motor are drilled off to gain access to the motor bushings and 3-In-One Motor Oil lubricates the parts



The speed disk and pull are polished and the disk height is adjusted to prevent it from touching the speed adjustment brake that can be seen in the front-right corner

COMMON MATERIALS FOR MAKING THIS TYPE OF PLINTH INCLUDE MDF, PLYWOOD, SOLID TIMBER AND EVEN CONCRETE. CLEARLY, A CONCRETE PLINTH IS BEYOND THE SCOPE OF MOST DIY PLINTH BUILDERS, BUT ALL THE OTHERS ARE RELATIVELY STRAIGHTFORWARD

Even amongst Garrard evangelists, there are doctrinal differences. Some will say that rumble was a problem even when the turntables were new, and the problem was made worse because most were poorly mounted in cabinet-style radiograms. Others maintain that a restored and properly maintained Garrard shouldn't generate significant noise… if any.

These divergent views lead to differences in opinion regarding the optimum plinth design for direct-drive turntables such as the Garrard 301 and 401. It's an age-old conundrum, because Garrard merely supplied the turntables and left it for customers to figure out how to mount them.

The manual provided installation instructions, along with templates for cutting a Garrard-shaped hole in a "substantial wooden motor board" and positioning the mounting bolts. Consequently, many 301s and 401s ended up in chipboard boxes with Perspex lids, but most agree it's the worst solution.

Two pieces of ply are cut out to create the motor board for the low-mass plinth

The motor board sections are glued together to ensure rigidity, and if you don't have enough clamps, screws can be used instead

It's a complex topic and we don't intend venturing too far down that rabbit hole, so at the risk of oversimplifying, we'll divide the plinth debate into two schools of thought – those who believe in high-mass plinths designed to soak up mechanical noise and those who advocate low-mass plinths, with a motor board resting on absorbent materials. We've decided to try our newly restored Garrard in both types, to determine if there are sonic differences between the two designs.

HIGH MASS

Imagine a rectangular block with a central recess just sufficient to accommodate the linkages and motor that hang underneath the Garrard's platter, and you'll have some idea what these plinths are all about. Common materials for making this type of plinth include MDF, plywood, solid timber and even concrete. Clearly, a concrete plinth is beyond the scope of most DIY plinth builders, but all the others are relatively straightforward.

You can find various online videos showing how people build these. The external dimensions will depend on the length of your tonearm, but the one we are testing measures 43cm square and accommodates a 9" Rega RB300 tonearm. To use a 12" tonearm, the plinth would need to be wider.

If you are making one, we would suggest ordering plywood or MDF pre-cut to size from your local timber merchants. You can also try your luck at B&Q or Homebase, where the materials may cost more, but the cutting service is free.

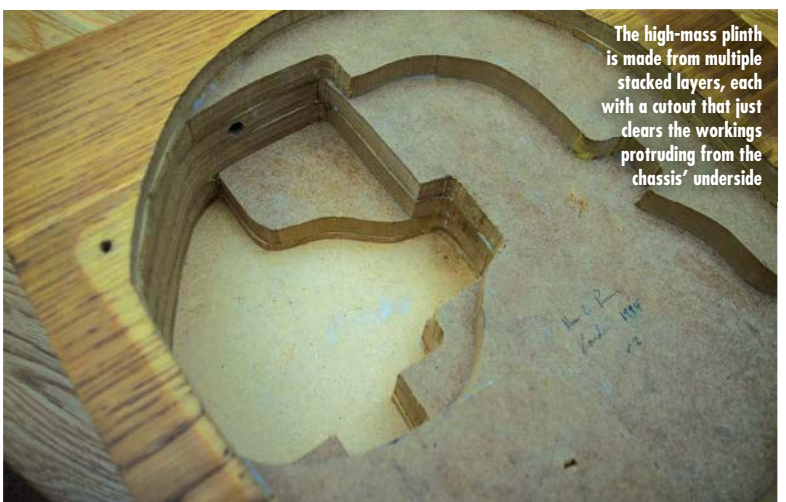
To make a plinth, cut the top-layer opening using the template provided in the 301 or 401 manuals and a jigsaw. You can find them online, or you can download a template from www.acoustica.org.uk/other/garrard.html. Align the turntable and secure it to the top layer using short screws with rubber washers to protect the paint, then flip it over, ensuring the weight doesn't rest on any of the Garrard's delicate parts. Using a profile gauge, determine the size and shape required for the second layer and make a paper template to ensure it's correct. Transfer the shape onto the second layer, cut out the hole and place it over the first layer. Continue the process until the combined depth of the stacked layers is deeper than the turntable's.

Don't forget to cut holes and wire channels at the back for the mains connection and tonearm wires; you also need to consider how to attach the Garrard and your tonearm to the plinth. Once you're happy, you can glue all the layers together – but you may prefer to leave the top layer detachable. Perhaps the most revered Garrard plinth is built this way. Originating in Japan, where vintage Garrards are held in very high esteem, the Shindo plinth is made from solid cherry wood, weighs about 60lbs and costs thousands.

LOW MASS

The design of this one is based on the Loricraft plinth. Loricraft has long been one of the UK's leading Garrard specialists and its plinth is characterised by "a rigid motor

If using a Sorbothane hemisphere, you'll need to drill holes into the platform



The high-mass plinth is made from multiple stacked layers, each with a cutout that just clears the workings protruding from the chassis' underside

It may look rough, but our thrown-together low-mass plinth (above) excelled

After applying walnut veneer and several coats of cellulose sealer and Tru-Oil, the plinth looks pretty good and brings out the best from our Garrard 301

board of minimal mass, suspended on air-filled decouplers". The air-filled decouplers in question have traditionally been squash balls – one located at each corner.

This type of plinth is much simpler to build, requiring a rigid outer frame with platforms in the corners. If you are using squash balls, or Sorbothane balls from Peak HiFi, you'll need to drill holes into the platform that are wide enough to hold the balls in place without them falling through. Alternatively, you can use Sorbothane hemispheres. The motor board is jigsawed out as before, but this time, two identical boards are cut and glued together to make up the depth and ensure rigidity. Drill four boltholes for the turntable and a hole for the tonearm, mount them onto the motor board and lower the board into the frame, ensuring there's a gap all around the board edges. As before, you can make holes for the mains and tonearm wires, or raise the plinth on spikes and run the wires through the gap.

TESTING TIMES

Ensuring that the cartridge alignment, tracking force and anti-skating adjustment remain consistent, we commence listening tests with the turntable playing through both a hi-fi and a studio monitoring system. Digital recordings are also made at the highest possible sample rate, to enable instantaneous A/B testing in a DAW.

Let's address the noise issue first. Had we not restored the turntable prior to comparing the plinths, the contrast may have been noticeable, but we can hear no significant difference in rumble or overall noise levels. There is some noise with both plinths, but it's barely perceptible and once the music starts playing, the signal-to-noise ratio is such that it's a non-issue.

Although we can't say for sure, the high-mass plinth may well be a better option for noisy, unrestored Garrards. However, it seems more like managing symptoms, rather than curing the underlying issue.

When noise isn't an issue, how do the two plinth designs compare sonically? The differences aren't night and day, but they're clearly audible. The solid plinth gets marginally deeper in the bass, but the low end is clearer, faster and better defined with the low-mass plinth. Comparing drums and percussion, the low-mass plinth has a faster transient response that makes music sound livelier and punchier.

We also find the low-mass plinth presents a slightly wider sonic picture, with more solid stereo imaging. It has a more open quality, too, with acoustic ambience and studio reverb effects much clearer to discern. The low-mass plinth is our clear winner; but research suggests the stacked MDF plinth is seen as the worst of all, and inferior to stacked plywood and solid-wood designs. I wasn't aware of that in 1994, when I built the solid plinth featured here – before I discovered the internet.

In a sense, we're disappointed by this outcome, because the low-mass plinth was knocked together and is hardly a beacon of woodworking finesse or presentation. Even so, after much veneering, lacquering and Tru-Oiling, we think it looks pretty good.

This completes our Garrard restoration project. It's been a lot of work and the costs have mounted up, but we think the stellar sound quality, allure and inherent value of vintage Garrards makes it all worthwhile. We also think that the mechanical restoration should be well within the capabilities of any competent DIYer.

The same can be said for plinths, but if you don't fancy building one, at least you now know what to look for if you're buying one. Check eBay, because there are tons to choose from and many look fantastic. We've also learned a thing or two about maintenance, and our Garrard's motor and bearing will henceforth be treated to fresh oil once or twice a year. With any luck, this 301 should be good for another 50 years. ●

IN OUR TESTS, WE ALSO FIND THE LOW-MASS PLINTH PRESENTS A SLIGHTLY WIDER SONIC PICTURE, WITH MORE SOLID STEREO IMAGING. IT HAS A MORE OPEN QUALITY, TOO, WITH ACOUSTIC AMBIENCE AND STUDIO REVERB EFFECTS MUCH CLEARER TO DISCERN

The Vinylist

BRIAN JONES

With an impressively organised array of over 10,000 records focusing in on the 50s to the 70s, reader **Brian Jones** collects rock 'n' roll, Americana, Motown and soul – and has an affinity for the honeyed tonsils of Nancy Wilson, Brenda Lee and Barbra Streisand…

To be in with a chance of seeing your record collection in *Long Live Vinyl*, email your details and a picture to longlivevinyl@anthem-publishing.com

What was the first record you bought?
"The first record I purchased was a copy of *Apache* by The Shadows in 1960. This 7" record opened my eyes and the bug was born! It cost 6s/4d [around 30p] and I bought it in Gloria's Record Bar in Glasgow… sadly no longer trading."

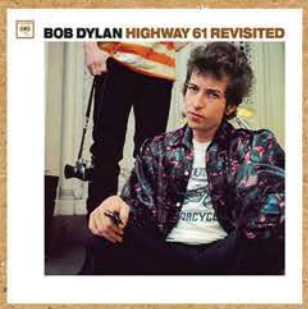
Which artists and genres are you most interested in?
"From the late 50s until the late 70s, including selected easy listening, rock 'n' roll, Beat groups, Americana and anything Motown. The major players would be Tony Bennett, Nancy Wilson, Bobby Darin (complete), Connie Francis, Peggy Lee, Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Cliff and The Shadows, Brenda Lee (complete), Little Richard, Gene Pitney and Bob Dylan. I have every LP by Barbra Streisand (to me the finest female singer of all time), and over 100 Beatles albums. The Stones, Floyd, Hollies and Moody Blues are all in there. Americana accounts for hundreds of albums, and Motown and soul account for loads of shelving!"

How many records do you have?
"I have around 8,000 LPs, 1,500 45s, 3,000 CDs and around 200-plus boxsets. I also have around 500 biographies, which I read avidly. These are stored in an understairs cupboard along with most of the boxsets. The LPs are all catalogued, and being a retired mathematician has made the job easier! Hundreds of other artists not mentioned above have mini-collections."

What's the most valuable record in your collection?
"I have an original copy of The Drifters' *Rockin' & Driftin'* from 1958. Not released in Britain, it can fetch £400 in mint condition. I also have Tom Petty's 7LP *Live…* set, which is worth around £800-plus now (very few pressed). Pink Floyd's *Pulse* set (unplayed) is another. One of my favourite sets is a full 13LP-collection of Japanese Beatles albums. With so many albums, a large percentage of them are in stunning condition."

What's the Holy Grail record that you'd most like to own?
"The first two albums from Elvis, in great condition… at the right price. That's the only Holy Grail for me."

What's your listening setup?
"A pair of Linn Espek floor-standers and a new VPI Traveler deck. I am operating with a Kenwood M-85 stack system, which has six units. Bought 24 years ago, it has been a trusted performer but is now starting to show its age. I'll upgrade significantly after the summer, and I'm thinking of a MOON amplifier, but still considering what else I need. The guys at Loud & Clear in Glasgow, a high-end hi-fi store, will see to that – Ian, John, Barbra et al. A great bunch and they will do anything for you." ●



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